This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

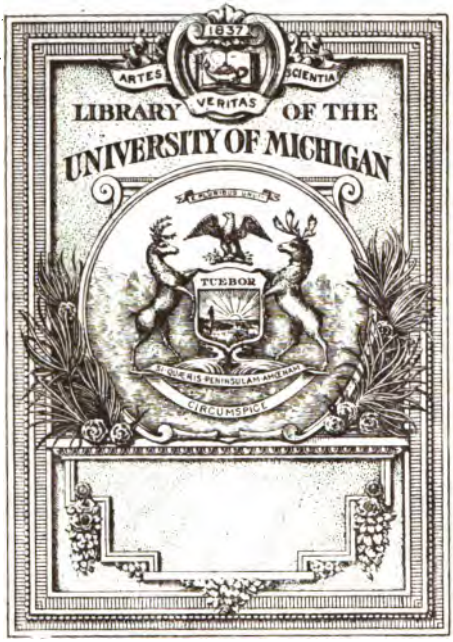
Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`



THE GIFT OF
Sidney C. Eastman

828
H86

WOOD LEIGHTON;

OR,

A YEAR IN THE COUNTRY.

BY MARY HOWITT,

AUTHOR OF "TALES IN PROSE,"

&c. &c.

"How fair thy vales, thy hills how beautiful!

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:

RICHARD BENTLEY, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.

1838.

WOOD LEIGHTON.

DENBOROUGH PARK.

PART I.

THE HEIRS-EXPECTANT.

CHAPTER VIII.

"To be sure, Jane can never marry Brian Livingstone, and it is my duty to counteract any such attachment. The idea of her marrying a country parson is quite ridiculous!"

Such was the substance of Mrs. Ashenhurst's thoughts as she entered their own apartments, and found a letter lying on the table; a letter from no other than Brian Livingstone, addressed to her daughter, and bearing the Wood Leighton postmark. "How lucky it is," she exclaimed, "that Jane is absent!" for that her daughter should receive the letter would be, in her opinion, a most unadvised thing. Mrs.

321322

Ashenhurst knew it would be much easier to crush the attachment in its present state than after the lovers had exchanged sentiments, even knowing, as they would, existing impediments. "But it shall not come to that," was her fixed determination, as she eyed critically the well-known and scholar-like handwriting of the once-admired Brian Livingstone, and remarked internally that his seal was handsome and well-cut. Mrs. Ashenhurst could conjecture perfectly well how the whole affair stood: her letter to Mrs. Burgoyne — the only one she had written to her from Denborough Park — had had the desired effect; it had silenced, perhaps offended her: but that was of little consequence. No doubt also it had given much pain to her nephew; it was possible that Jane too might be thought accessory: neither was that of importance. Certain it was, the intended visit and the declaration of love had both been withheld, and in all probability there would have been an end of the affair, but for the inopportune death of the old rector of Collington-Magna, which had thus placed Brian in a sufficiently independent state to renew his suit.

"But it shall never be!" exclaimed the cogitating lady: "my daughter shall match with an equal in fortune, or a superior in rank!" And with these words, hastily glancing over the epistle, which overflowed with the eloquence of love, she consigned it to the flames—a far different destination to what the writer had hoped for it!

Having thus taken the affair into her own hands, it behoved her to finish it. A ready plan suggested itself; and, as if Fortune played the game for her, who should be announced at that moment but Lady Cornbury. Of this right honourable personage we must be permitted a few words.

Lady Cornbury had taken the place formerly occupied by Mrs. Burgoyne; she was Mrs. Ashenhurst's most favoured and most admired friend—in fact, she was the most elevated in rank of all her acquaintance.

Lord and Lady Cornbury lived at Wilton Hall, ten miles from Denborough Park. They had exchanged visits with General Dubois; but not until Mrs. Ashenhurst had become his inmate, did the acquaintance advance beyond etiquette. Mrs. Ashenhurst and her daughter pleased even

them; and her ladyship, dignified, cold, and generally inactive as she was, made extraordinary exertions and unheard-of efforts to do them honour. It was enough for Mrs. Ashenhurst, lover of rank as she was, that her friend was the wife of an honourable peer, and was in herself the representative of a noble line. Nothing more was needed: Mrs. Burgoyne, the old tried friend of many years, was dethroned, and the coroneted lady took her place.

A thousand pities it was that Lady Cornbury had no son; a thousand more, that the heir of Wilton and the title had quarrelled with them a dozen years ago. Poor Mrs. Ashenhurst had no patience with him; though her ladyship, too indolent to be a good hater, seemed herself already to have forgotten the cause of offence, and spoke of him with kindness, though she persisted that they never should be friends again. Still Mrs. Ashenhurst consoled herself that Jane's honourable and noble husband elect would come through the hands of the Cornburys.

Her ladyship was between fifty and sixty years of age; short and plump, fair and smooth, blue-eyed and flaxen-haired, and quiet to a miracle,

She had never spoken fifty, nor half fifty, consecutive words at one time in the whole course of her life; nor had ever walked a hundred yards, where it was possible by any human contrivance to introduce either carriage or chair: she never read, because it tired her eyes; nor did any kind of work, because she had never been used to it. That a being so nearly approaching a nonentity could ever have been in a passion, was a moral impossibility; an equally impossible thing was it, that she could ever have laughed—laughed in the real sense of the word—a side-shaking laughter. Yet there was at all times, and on all occasions, an ever-enduring smile or semblance of a smile on her yet red and perfectly-formed lips, which made the world call her the sweetest-tempered woman in the universe. Care and trouble and anxiety were things that had never come near the smooth current of her existence. As to their darker shades, sorrow and disappointment and anguish, mental or bodily, such things were so far out of her ladyship's comprehension, that nobody could have thought of her sympathising with them. Her nature could only be emblemed by a polished steel mirror, bright,

and reflecting back images of splendour or happiness, itself cold and impassive the while.

Lord Cornbury was her counterpart. Public life, its perplexities, its annoyances, and its activities, were not for him: he took his seat in the House, but was scarcely seen there again. The greater part of his time he spent at his favourite residence of Wilton: he planted, he farmed, he bred cattle, and audited his steward's accounts; besides this, he ate, he drank, he slept.

Mrs. Ashenhurst, with her quiet gentlewomanliness, yet profound veneration for rank, was a prodigious favourite with them, and especially, as after the first advances all activity of friendship,—no, certainly that is not the term—of intimacy, was performed by her: she made four calls for her ladyship's one—went twice a week invariably—took them all the passing county news; she talked, and they listened.

That Lord and Lady Cornbury were the most insufferably dull people in the world, was an opinion Jane entertained in spite of her mother. Still Wilton was a grand old place, less ostentatious than Denborough Park; there was a repose and dignity in its old carving and gilding,

its old furniture, its old pictures, and its old sober domestics, in their demure murrey-coloured livery, which she preferred to the new magnificence and costly decoration and officious ministration of her own home. Besides this, she was more perfectly at liberty there; was there free to act and think for herself; Lady Cornbury neither wishing nor asking her to talk, sing, read, or play. She loved, as she told Mrs. Ashenhurst, to look at Jane: she sat so well, and walked so well, and was really such a lovely creature, that it was quite a comfort to have her there. Lord Cornbury said the same.

Could anything have been more fortunate than that her ladyship should come this very morning to request Jane's company for a week or ten days? "For," said she, "they tell me the park is looking so well!—but for my part I never notice such things." Mrs. Ashenhurst declared herself delighted with the proposal, and Jane entering at that moment, was informed of the pleasure that was offered her. "I know you love to be with her ladyship, my dear, and the change will do you good."

Jane assented with sincere willingness; for she

thought of the rambles she should have in Wilton-Park, unattended even by servants if such were her pleasure ;—how she could indulge there her own speculations and fancies, and even perhaps forget that there was such a person in the world as Sir Harbottle Grimstone ; and, moreover, she should be ten miles nearer to Collington-Magna.

In a few hours she took her seat by the side of the placid Lady Cornbury ; and as she was driven away from Denborough Park, through the fine gloom of an autumnal day, the annoying and soul-sickening memory of the baronet, and of her uncle's prohibitions, gradually gave way before the fair and rose-coloured visions of hope. Little did the poor girl think she was conveying herself away from the very being whom of all others she desired to see ; — from the very being who cast a glory over these heart-creations, like the sun over the clouds of his setting.

That was a weary day for Brian Livingstone : the morrow, however, brought the answer to his letter.

" Mrs. Ashenhurst begged the honour of an hour's conversation with the Rev. Brian Livingstone."

It was with an anxious and foreboding heart that he entered the noble demesne. The grandeur of Jane's new home, her unquestionably altered fortunes, fell upon his senses like a crushing weight. It requires no ordinary philosophy to resist the influence of these things; but the man were unworthy of a woman's love who, with an internal consciousness of his own worth—his honourable, upright intentions, would not pass through even a more trying ordeal than this spirit-crushing one. Brian was a man to dare all things, to endure all things; still he had received too ominous a summons not to be alive to all discouraging impressions.

Mrs. Ashenhurst received him with a show of civility, and inquired after Mrs. Burgoyne and his sister. He told of their removal to Bath. She affected no surprise, for her manner was intended to prove that circumstances had placed every one connected with him out of the range of the Denborough Park sympathies. Brian felt the intended sentiment; and, assuming a coldness equal to her own, said he was there by her own request, but that he hoped to have the pleasure of seeing Miss Ashenhurst."

"My daughter, sir, left home yesterday, to spend a few days with our friend Lady Cornbury," was her reply.

"Am I to understand that she left home in consequence of a letter I had the honour of addressing to her?" asked he.

"You are at liberty, sir, to form your own conjectures. My daughter knows her duty: I shall not pretend ignorance of the purport of your letter, Mr. Livingstone; and after what I said to Mrs. Burgoyne, I consider it a breach of propriety in you to address my daughter."

"You have seen the letter?" asked Livingstone.

"My daughter did not show me your letter," was Mrs. Ashenhurst's reply; "but it is enough for you to know that such a connexion is undesirable."

Brian felt at this moment perhaps more indignant than a minister of Christ should have felt; yet he condescended to remonstrate, informing Mrs. Ashenhurst that he was now in possession of the rectory of Collington-Magna; therefore, perhaps, less presumptuous in declaring an attachment of which he had hoped she was aware before she and Miss Ashenhurst left Harbury.

"Neither my daughter nor myself," replied she, "are entirely at liberty to indulge our own predilections, even supposing they existed. General Dubois stands in the place of a parent to Miss Ashenhurst, and as such has a right to be consulted."

"Let me see General Dubois," said Livingstone eagerly.

"You mistake me, sir: my brother has certain peculiarities of opinion — prejudices I shall not call them — he is too liberal and noble-minded for prejudices; but he has declared that his niece shall not marry a clergyman. I cannot entirely hold with him, because it might prevent my daughter connecting herself very properly, both as to rank and fortune; still, I do not see that we have any right to oppose his opinions, —it is our duty to submit."

"A man who would adopt so unreasonable, not to say unchristian a prejudice," replied he warmly, "certainly would be very likely to exact implicit obedience."

"I beg, sir, I may hear no insinuations against General Dubois," returned Mrs. Ashenhurst with equal warmth: "our greatest happiness is to fall in with his wishes!"

"Was this declaration with respect to a clergyman made in consequence of my addresses to Miss Ashenhurst?" asked Brian.

"I cannot see, Mr. Livingstone, what right you have to make these inquiries."

"I have a right, and you are in duty bound to answer them, inasmuch as you are bound not to trample on the happiness of a fellow-being!"

"It was not made with immediate reference to you," replied Mrs. Ashenhurst, impressed by the solemnity of his manner; "but as an unfolding of his views towards my daughter, when he rejected the suit of Sir Harbottle Grimstone."

"Ha!" said Brian; "Sir Harbottle is then rejected,—thank God!"

"There is no occasion to say much more on this subject, Mr. Livingstone; this you clearly understand,—General Dubois will never consent to his niece marrying a clergyman, were it the Archbishop of Canterbury. This he has declared repeatedly. He is not a man to retract; and, I confess it to you, Mr. Livingstone, he is not a man to displease with impunity. We owe this consideration to ourselves; and I must beseech of you, as a minister of the gospel, as a preacher

of peace, and a maintainer of the unity of families, that you will never renew this subject. If you value my daughter's happiness, you will not do it!"

"God knows," said Brian, "how dear, how sacred the happiness of Miss Ashenhurst must ever be to me! Still, I cannot calmly resign her on these grounds alone. Let me hear from her own lips that there is no hope for me, and I may perhaps then learn to submit without murmuring!"

"My dear sir!" said Mrs. Ashenhurst, who began to be alarmed at the turn things were taking, "I have no wish to impose restrictions, or to place impediments in your way; but I will state the case, and then leave it to your honour. Jane could not marry a clergyman, were he the Bishop of London."

"No," said Brian; "but I would willingly believe she might accept the Rector of Collington-Magna, while she might reject a more dignified clergyman."

"I do not dispute it," was her answer; "but supposing you yourself the Archbishop of York, she could not marry you without forfeiting the

favour of her uncle; and this she will not do, —I know she will not, Mr. Livingstone: Jane is a high-principled girl, and will sacrifice her inclination to her duty, and even you must admire her for such conduct."

"You assure me, then, that I have still an interest in Miss Ashenhurst's heart!"

"I have no right to make confessions for my daughter, Mr. Livingstone; but, I assure you, her peace of mind would not be improved by such an interview, however much yours might; nor should I think it generous in you to persist in the wish."

"I would not for the world give Miss Ashenhurst pain, and yet ——"

"And yet," said Mrs. Ashenhurst, interrupting him, "you would desire an interview which must of necessity occasion more uncertainty—more distress of mind than her present determination has cost her. Disguise it as you will, Mr. Livingstone, such a wish on your part is selfish, and, I will candidly tell you, must be fruitless: you would only distress and agitate her to no earthly purpose!"

Brian passed his hand across his brow, and

for two seconds made no answer: at length he said,

"It is strange, it is not like her usual consideration, to make no reply to my letter. Three months are not sufficiently long to have deadened a heart naturally noble and generous as Miss Ashenhurst's was, or I could almost have suspected such a cause."

"For that matter, Mr. Livingstone, my daughter knew that all which it was necessary to say, I should say for her. We are not in the situation we were at Harbury; we are not now entirely free agents, as I hinted before. As to my daughter," added she, seeing him about to speak, "you may be sure I can have nothing but her happiness at heart; and when I state how much her equanimity must fruitlessly suffer from such an interview as you desire, I do it in the hope you will spare her the suffering. I leave it to your own good sense, Mr. Livingstone. I believe my daughter is dear to you—nor is there any one who wishes you better than I do, and could this interview serve any good purpose I would not oppose it. Having stated thus much, I leave it to your better judgment."

Mrs. Ashenhurst had strung all these professions together in her most candid manner and most kindly voice to prevent Brian replying, and at the same time to impose upon him a thorough belief in her good faith. He now sat silent and uncertain, his mind agitated by the most painful feelings,—disappointment, love, and in some degree self-reproach.

"I have been miserably unfortunate," at length he said, "in delaying what ought to have been avowed before you left Harbury, and which would have been avowed save from sentiments of delicacy. I dreaded the sarcasm and scorn which you heaped on that fool Parkinson! Heaven knows, I ought to have had more self-respect! Certain visions too of romantic generosity made me willing to defer it: I was less sanguine in your expectations from General Dubois than I ought to have been. God knows, I have been punished!" said he with a voice of the deepest heart-anguish. "I should have been the happiest of men to have offered Miss Ashenhurst a handsome independency had she been disappointed in her expectations!"

"It is useless, Mr. Livingstone, to imagine

cases; we have only to do with what has really occurred."

"Very true," said Brian; "but you must allow the man who has lost his all to indulge some regrets!"

"Again reverting to this interview, Mr. Livingstone, you surely cannot persist in desiring it?" urged Mrs. Ashenhurst.

"I have no reason to doubt your assurances," he replied; "and if I am certainly to believe Miss Ashenhurst by her own wish left this place to avoid seeing me, I have no right to desire it: your assurance of this will be enough."

"It was without any compulsion—by her own will, that she embraced the offer of our friends at Wilton to accompany them."

Brian heard it as the criminal hears his sentence from the mouth of the judge. A shade passed over his brow, his lips quivered, and his hands were momentarily clenched. Mrs. Ashenhurst respected the suffering she had inflicted, and was silent. In a few moments he rose, and, without speaking, offered her his hand.

"You are such as I believed you," said she, taking his hand with the utmost kindness; "you

are a noble-minded, excellent man. I have no doubt, Mr. Livingstone, but your best days are to come."

"You are more flattering than my own heart," was his reply, in a suppressed tone of bitterness and agony; and disengaging his hand, he hastily left the room.

This was too important an event to be concealed in the lady's own breast; nor did many hours elapse before the general was possessed of its detail. Of course the value of the sacrifice was heightened: he was called "an old and most highly valued friend, the nephew of a friend equally dear; but he had been rejected entirely from a desire to conform to the general's wishes;" Mrs. Ashenhurst declaring that she never was so happy as when evincing her gratitude to her brother. At the same time, she besought him to conceal from Jane this rejection of a suitor to whom she had reason to believe her attached, as she wished by all means to spare her feelings; and she esteemed herself most fortunate, she averred, that the gentleman had come at a time of her absence.

There was something sinister in the general's eye as he professed himself her debtor, declaring that such a proof of attachment should not be forgotten, at the same time wishing she had introduced this gentleman to his acquaintance before she had taken this step, as in all cases he had much rather be consulted.

Upon the whole, there was something in his manner which was unsatisfactory; and poor Mrs. Ashenhurst, with all her plotting, fell thus much short in self-approbation.

CHAPTER IX.

Surely the heart is no sorcerer, or the days Jane passed at Wilton, gorgeous and calm as autumn days could be, had not slid on like an uninterrupted festival. At Wilton no events seemed ever to occur; it was a charmed land of untroubled rest, and from morning till night, from night till morning, Jane had full leisure to indulge her own visions and fancies. They were happy days, perhaps happier than most

she had passed since she left Harbury; therefore is it that I believe the heart to be no sorcerer.

Never had Jane been in a fitter mood than now to enjoy a sojourn in an old, stately mansion like Wilton. She ranged over the house at will, through ancient chambers and galleries, and in imagination peopled them with their long-perished possessors. She made herself familiar with all the old family portraits and their histories; some bright, fair histories, that the heart fed upon and took courage from; others dark and terrible, full of that fearful tragic interest which saddens and thrills the listener, and haunts him for days like a destiny. She turned over the old richly-bound and coroneted volumes of the library; books which, by their appearance, had not been opened since the days of the Lady Jacquettas of fearful memory, and the Lord Ernests of olden and darker days. She feasted on Milton and Shakspeare, those treasuries of poetry, and heart-philosophy which is the substance of poetry,—on the very pages she had so lately turned over with the friend who first opened her soul to their knowledge; she heard, as it were, his deep, thrilling

voice read passage after passage,—their full meaning unfolded before her,—her soul seemed exalted and ennobled by their sublime imaginings, or the depths of her heart laid open before their subtle and truth-searching spirits. Never did Jane know till then how that beloved friend made a part of her soul's existence, how love and poetry had grown together, and how they created those holy and ennobling sentiments which it was her greatest happiness to indulge. All her reading, however, was not poetry in its accepted sense, though certainly poetry in its spirit: here she found Froissart, that grand old chronicler, who united the matter-of-fact observer so wonderfully with the poet, and who has left a Chronicle more valuable for its picture of manners, costume, and feeling, and for its brave old chivalric spirit, than even for its circumstantial history. Here she found the old romances, Amadis de Gaul, Morte d'Arthur, Charlemagne, and the quaint but fascinating stories of Chaucer; and here again, those old divines, Jeremy Taylor, South, and Barrow, who, in the earnest eloquence of their high right-mindedness, wrote less to produce effect than to touch the heart with eternal truths, and

have left works which will be read and read again when more ambitious writers are lost in oblivion, and sects and parties are forgotten.

What a refreshment, what a strengthening of the soul sprang from these studies! The annoying memory of Sir Harbottle Grimstone seemed gone; and even when the heart-wringing consciousness returned that a vow had been registered against Brian Livingstone by her proud uncle, and accorded to by her worldly-minded mother, if Jane wept, it was not as one who is utterly forlorn.

At the end of three weeks Jane returned home. Again things fell into their usual course; the leaves had kindled in the gorgeous colouring of autumn, and had then faded and fallen before the winds and frosts of the early winter. Mrs. Ashenhurst and her daughter had now been six months at Denborough Park. According to the feelings of the former, she might have lived there all her days, so completely did she fall into and adopt all the requirings of her situation. That she owed this great and perfect happiness to the accidental laming of a poor soldier, she was in a fair way of forgetting.

Daniel Neale had refused all offers of assistance, as far as fixing him at a park-gate or in a shrubbery-cottage went. He took up his residence at Wood Leighton; whence radiating as from a centre in all directions on his vagrant expeditions, he never presented himself at Denborough Park; and as the general invariably spoke of him with contempt and dislike, Mrs. Ashenhurst did not trouble herself farther about him than by throwing him a piece of money occasionally when he came in her way. Jane, not satisfied with the indifference of her elders, visited him at his house in Wood Leighton; but the bitterness with which he often spoke of her uncle, and the hints he dropped, "that if she chose he could tell her something," displeased her, and in this respect she so far imitated her mother as to hold no farther intercourse with him than by relieving him liberally whenever they met.

All this time Mrs. Ashenhurst had not let pass without narrowly watching her brother; endeavouring to fathom the hidden guilt, if such there were, that occasionally gloomed his spirit; or how those mysterious penances were performed

of which such fearful rumours were abroad. But the general defied all her skill; she knew no more at the end of six months than she had known at the end of two, although the same alternations of spirit and temper remained, and the same portion of each day was spent in the privacy of his own chamber. Into that chamber she never got access; it was only entered by the general, who himself kept the key, and by his valet once a day, and that only while his master remained in a dressing-room or an adjoining apartment. The chamber was as mysterious and impenetrable as ever. Mrs. Ashenhurst had once, in a propitious moment, as she thought, spoken of his jewels; but he had only glanced upon her his sinister eye, laughed, and assured her that she and her daughter already possessed the most valuable of them: and once she had ventured to speak of the iron chest; but that once sufficed; she would not again have perilled her abode at Denborough Park had she believed the chest and its contents would have been given up to her for her pains. Mrs. Ashenhurst was ever after contented to remain in ignorance, looking back to the time when she had dared so

greatly with astonishment at her fool-hardiness. What, however, was the precise mode in which her curiosity was rewarded, she never divulged; we have told as much as ever descended to posterity.

Week after week went on, and the hope that was long deferred made the heart weary. "It is strange, it is passing strange," thought Jane, and in proportion as Brian seemed voluntarily to have resigned her, did the consciousness of her uncle's prohibition lose its weight. She felt that it was unkind thus to give her up to her barren exaltation. What to her was this splendour of the present, or the promise of the future, deserted as she felt herself to be by the only being for whom it could be valued, or with whom it could be enjoyed? He could know nothing of her uncle's prejudices; why then was she less worthy of his love than formerly? How happy, how perfectly happy seemed the days of their abiding at Harbury! The unpretending drawing-room—the two quiet maid-servants—the very discarded India chintz gown, the first thing given up as unworthy of their new fortunes—all seemed in her eyes to belong to a preferable order of things

To those days belonged the friendly gossip of the kind-hearted Mrs. Burgoyne; the frequent call from Brian Livingstone,—the walks taken with him through wood and meadow, and by water-side—dewy early-morning walks, fresh and full of the spirit of gladness, embleming so aptly hopeful and rejoicing youth,—or sunset strolls, when everything about them seemed visible poetry. There were the books they read together, the songs she sang for him, and learned to like for his sake; and over all was the perfect fellowship of mind and heart—the love understood though never formally acknowledged. And all this had been resigned for what?—for a splendour which already palled—for new friends to whom she could not give her heart—for some yet-to-be-found alliance, in which rank and fortune alone made the requisites. And still more, Jane sorrowfully felt, though she was jealous of acknowledging it to herself, that the feelings and opinions of her mother had all undergone a change—she had sold herself for the possession of worldly greatness.

It was fortunate for Jane Ashenhurst that with deep sensibilities she possessed great strength of

character; and when the melancholy fear that Brian Livingstone had voluntarily abandoned her, as time went on became conviction, she saw her duty before her,—to struggle with her own heart, and, with a woman's high principle and purity of sentiment, to eradicate those precious hopes, "which, it may be," argued the poor girl, somewhat against a lingering belief in his good faith, "he may have relinquished with all man's coldness and offended self-love." Jane was thankful that her duty was so plain and clear before her as to admit of no doubt, nor even to need asking counsel on; and the very idea showed her how forlorn she was—for of whom could she ask counsel and not be answered by worldly arguments or unreasonable prejudices?

Time still went on; and week after week passed as uneventfully even at Denborough Park as at Wilton Hall, spite of a round of Christmas visits, suppers and balls, all stately and dull. But now the grand event approached—the long-talked-of banquet, which was to be celebrated on the 12th of March, the general's birthday, and to astonish all the world by its magnificence and splendour.

Not a word had been heard of Brian Livingstone; he might have been dead, for any tidings of him that seemed to reach Denborough Park. But again on this long-lost topic Jane was destined to be enlightened by her faithful abigail; who, however, it must be understood, was about leaving Jane's service.

"Ay, dear me, ma'am! and such a preparation as there is! One would think the house was large enough and grand enough without all this altering and building," said Betty, meaning to make this banquet of which everybody talked an introduction to another subject.

"General Dubois means to surprise everybody; it will be a most magnificent entertainment," was Jane's reply.

"And if I could get your leave," said Betty, "I don't think I should be here to see it."

"How is that?"

"Why, ma'am, if it would make no difference to you, and I could go at the end of next week instead of the week after, I should be much obliged; and as you are to have the niece of Mrs. Ashenhurst's woman, I should think—nay,

ma'am, I 'm sure she would come a week earlier; at least Carter says so."

"But I cannot conceive," said Jane, "why you are in such a hurry to leave."

"Why, Miss Jane,—but why need I make a secret of it, and so good as you always are?—but I 'm going to be married;" and poor Betty looked infinitely ashamed of the confession.

"Married!—Indeed!"

"Why, ma'am, Thomas Thackaray has been left Mr. Livingstone's service ever since November; or rather, I didn't like he should go over seas,—you know it 's such a risk—there 's such a casualty, ma'am."

"You are going to be married, Betty?" said Miss Ashenhurst, with as much calmness as she could command. "Why did you say Thackaray had left his place?"

"Ay, ma'am, how could I let him go abroad, though it was with Mr. Livingstone! The rectory is given up to a curate, ma'am, and Mr. Livingstone has been gone ever since the end of November: it was a thousand pities, such a sweet place as it is!"

This information was so unlooked-for, that Jane could not conceal her surprise: she busied herself, however, with her jewel-box, believing that Betty would continue the subject; and, as she expected, the waiting-woman resumed:—

"Thomas has got a new service, to which he is to go just a month after—after we are married, Miss Jane, if so be you could set me at liberty."

"And you wish to spend the honeymoon together," said Jane, determined to exert herself: "but you will not like to part with your husband so soon."

"Oh, Miss Jane, no; we are to go to Harbury, to his friends and mine for the first month, and then we go into the same service—a place Mr. Livingstone got for us. I shall have washing to do, and get up the linen. We are to have a small house in the grounds, with a pretty garden, Miss Jane, and a honeysuckle porch. It will be a very good situation,—at Sir Robert Combe's."

"I will oppose nothing to your plans and wishes," said Jane, sympathising in her waiting-woman's exultation: "Thackaray has been a faithful lover, and I am sure you will make him a good wife."

Betty blushed, and declared Miss Ashenhurst was too good to say so. "But, ay dear!" said she, emboldened by her lady's kindness, "if you could but have liked Mr. Livingstone!"

Jane looked at her in silence; and Betty, stammering and ashamed, feared she had offended.

"I cannot imagine," observed her mistress, "what cause you have for connecting my name with Mr. Livingstone's in the way you do."

"Dear me!" replied Betty; "Mr. Livingstone as surely loved you as ever gentleman loved a lady; everybody at Harbury knew it."

"They were a set of impertinent people there," was the lady's answer.

"Yes, ma'am, maybe they were; and I've no business to talk in this way. But only to think of Mr. Livingstone going into foreign parts, and to leave that fine place at Collington-Magna! And Thomas says he was sure something was on his mind—he seemed so cut-up. But, to be sure, if you did not fancy him—— Only Thomas says——"

"I desire that neither Thackaray nor you will make me, as connected with Mr. Livingstone,

the subject of your conversation," said Jane coldly.

"Oh dear, Miss Jane! to think of my offending you! Only," continued the pertinacious Betty, piqued at the little value her lady set on the remarks of her husband elect,—"Only, I should never like to see another Mrs. Livingstone, as is like enough, seeing the store Sir Robert's daughters set on him, and them all so handsome!"

"This is nothing less than impertinence," said Miss Ashenhurst, with unwonted dignity; "I cannot allow you to continue the subject, and I desire it never may be resumed."

Betty had far overshot her mark: she meant to serve Mr. Livingstone, but she had offended her lady, and, humbled to the very dust, she sat down in her own chamber crying bitterly, and wishing her tongue had been cut out before she had said any single word to vex dear Miss Ashenhurst. "Oh dear, oh dear!" sobbed she, "I shall never forgive myself as long as ever I live!"

CHAPTER X.

Poor Betty did, however, live to forgive herself: she did live to wear a wedding-cap trimmed by the fair hands of her dear lady,—to eat a wedding-dinner, for which her lady paid the cost, and to receive from her ten golden guineas in a purse, over and above her wages, to help in the furnishing of that cottage with the honeysuckle porch, and the pretty garden which seemed the paradise of the poor bride's imagination. A proud and a happy woman was Mrs. Thackaray the younger, and she spread the fame and glory of her late mistress throughout and round about the town of Harbury; yet, spite of her gratitude and of her lady's prohibition, she did wish many a time that "Miss Jane could but have fancied poor Mr. Livingstone!"

And now came the time of the banquet. Great and anxious had been the general expectation for many weeks throughout the whole country as to *who* would be invited: it was given out that everybody with any claim to rank, family, fortune, or gentility was to be invited; therefore many were the conjectures, many the secret

wishes and fears, that agitated many an individual bosom and many a little circle. "Would Mrs. so-and-so and her daughters be asked?"—"would Mr. such-a-one and his wife be invited?" Many a restless, anxious night, full of dreams of perplexed disappointment, was spent by those who dwell, as it were, on the border-land between the privileged and non-privileged classes. Everybody felt that it would be really a less honour to be invited, than an eternal dishonour to be excluded. "I shall never bear to go again into company," was the internal murmur of many a spinster and widow-lady of small income but great pretension, "if I am not invited to Denborough Park for the 12th of March."

The time for the banquet was now at hand. The whole house underwent a change: one entire suite of apartments was fitted up for a banqueting-room; the saloon was re-arranged, and a ball-room and orchestra were fitted up in the most expensive and gorgeous style, as if the place had originally been designed for purposes of public entertainment. An immense temporary building was erected, extending from the conservatories into which the saloon opened several hundred yards into the gardens,

and into these were introduced whole groves and gardens of oriental and tropical trees and flowers; rich carpets covered the floors, and hangings of inconceivable splendour clothed the walls; couches and sofas the most luxurious that could be devised were placed everywhere; and all was lighted with shaded or richly-coloured lamps, which in burning emitted a fragrant perfume.

An awning of silk extended from the portico to the entrance of the shubbery, illuminated with innumerable coloured lamps, shining out like intense stars from among the shrubs and trees which the awning inclosed, giving to them a magical effect, as if they were wrought in topaz, ruby, and chrysolite; while here and there shone out, in Nature's own adorning, the tall and quivering branches of the almond-trees, clothed over with their pale pink blossoms, that looked even paler in that illuminated atmosphere. A carpet of rich green, soft as moss, and intended to represent it, covered the whole way, bordered on either hand with the real flowers of the season, snowdrops, crocuses, primroses, thickly set in a beautiful mosaic; it was the very entrance of an enchanted palace. Beyond this covered walk, at

the commencement of which the company alighted, lamps were suspended in the trees through the whole windings of the carriage-road to the park-gates, producing a fine effect seen from any point, as if a chain of light undulated onward to the grand centre of attraction. The night was fine, but extremely dark, as if made on purpose to assist the general effect.

Of the immense number of delicacies furnished forth to the company it is useless to attempt speaking; unfortunately we have not the gift of describing such things. Suffice it to say, that it was the most magnificent banquet that art or money could furnish; and that all the country round, who had any pretension to rank, wealth, family, or fashion, were invited, and were there, saving and except Sir Harbottle Grimstone.

But before we dismiss the banquet, we must say, that nothing could surpass the delightful suavity of the nabob, nor the ease, perfect grace, and graciousness of Mrs. Ashenhurst, whose regal dress of purple velvet and ermine, with a tiara of silver tissue spangled with diamonds and plumed with ostrich-feathers, excited universal admiration;

and that there was no young lady present so distinguished as Jane Ashenhurst for beauty and every other desirable female quality. Her dress was of the palest pink, of the nabob's own choosing, and she wore the renowned Furnapore diamonds. These important subjects dismissed, let us hasten now to what may be called the event of the night,—the event, at least, in which our story has most concern.

In the course of the assembling of the guests, Jane was startled by seeing at a distance a figure so strongly resembling Mr. Livingstone, that for the moment she turned aside to conceal the emotion of which she was conscious. The figure was the same; the same style of person, —tall, rather slight, but remarkably well-knit, —altogether striking, with a general air rather of high breeding than fashion: the turn of the head, the mode of standing, all resembled Brian Livingstone.

In a while the whole crowd had shifted; he was gone. At dinner she discovered him at a lower table; for the nabob's family and his more noble and dignified guests occupied the dais of

the banqueting-room, while he went from table to table paying attention to all alike.

"Who is the gentleman in black, whose back is to us, and to whom my uncle is now speaking?" asked Jane of Lady Cornbury, who sat near her.

"I cannot tell," said her ladyship; "it is so far to look."

Jane repeated her inquiry, but without success; no one knew him.

"Bless me!" said Mrs. Ashenhurst; "he is very like a person I know."

"Can it indeed be Brian Livingstone?" thought she, without venturing to look at her mother; "and if so, why is he here?"

No sooner did the assembly break up, than Mrs. Ashenhurst, who felt no less agitation and anxiety than her daughter, mingled among the guests to discover who the stranger was. Jane watched her movements with intense interest, and, to her amazement, saw her after a while formally introduced to him, and, what was more, actually advancing with him towards the place where she stood. The resemblance to Brian Livingstone was but of manner and figure; for, strictly speaking, the countenance was much

handsomer, and the expression more grave and thoughtful. He was introduced, "Mr. Vigors, a relative and guest of our friend Sir Willoughby Doyne," added the lady with a most gracious smile, which intimated to her daughter that she was at liberty to cultivate his acquaintance.

The evening passed away delightfully. As Jane looked on her new friend, her heart warmed towards him;—he, too, was equally charmed with his companion. As the amusements of the evening commenced, they were of necessity parted; but they met and met again as if drawn together by mutual attraction. His conversation was wonderfully captivating, full of earnest and deep thought, which, at times, leaving the place and people among whom they were, revelled on the subjects of art, literature, foreign lands and manners, and the wonders and beauties of our own country; while his mind seemed a perfect creation of original thought and observation, or of that which perhaps strikes the listener equally, the power of presenting accepted opinions and observations in new forms and with new combinations: yet over all lay a shade of tender melancholy—a tone of voice, an expression of the

eye, which irresistibly touched her heart, and assured her that he had experienced some deep sorrow which had tinged to sadness one of the most lofty and cheerful of spirits.

While she was occupied in music, he stood near her, listening with that silent, profound attention, which is infinitely more grateful and flattering to a mind of taste and sensibility than the most extravagant and ecstatic praise. Jane mean time was sensible that she played but for one listener; and never since the days when she played Brian Livingstone's favourite airs at Harbury, had she so completely devoted herself to please — so completely enjoyed the fascinations of sweet sounds as now.

Mr. Vigors did not dance, and so he told her, or he should have requested the honour of her hand. Jane wondered; "It was so charming an exercise, so beautiful in its figures—nay," said she, blushing at her own enthusiasm, "I have looked on a set of beautiful dancers, with their inimitable grace and harmony of motion, till it has thrilled me like a fine passage of poetry. I wonder *you* do not dance!"

Mr. Vigors made no reply; but he looked on her, while she spoke, with that admiring, affectionate interest, which the most delicate soul might receive without offence.

"What a singularly interesting man! what a strangely fascinating influence he seems to have over me!" thought she, as, thrilled and yet warmed into a sentiment of affection, she turned from him to mingle with the fluttering triflers who surrounded her, to be courted, flattered, and annoyed by the fulsome tribute of the men, or to hear the flippant folly of the ladies, which at last drove her to take refuge under the shadow of the monotonous Lady Cornbury's wing; where she had leisure and silence to think how much the one she had shunned gained in comparison with all she had since seen.

The company began to disperse, and Mr. Vigors was again at her side. He assured her it was long since he had experienced pleasure such as that evening had afforded him, and hoped he might be permitted to renew the acquaintance thus happily formed for himself at an early opportunity. Jane blushed, and said she be-

lieved the general and Mrs. Ashenhurst would have much pleasure in his acquaintance.

Mr. Vigors heard the compliment without a smile; adding, in the most impressive tones of his singularly sweet but touching voice, that he hoped Miss Ashenhurst would permit him to introduce to *her*, at an early time, the being most dear to him.

It was now Jane's turn to hear without replying: she knew neither what he meant, nor what she ought to say. Mr. Vigors seemed not to expect an answer, but, glancing on her one of those peculiar looks of almost holy and affectionate interest, he took his departure.

"That 's a fine young man!" said Lady Cornbury; and Jane, startled by such an unusual display of energy from her ladyship, was made aware of Mr. Vigors having left the rooms.

"What could he mean! Was he married?" The thought struck almost painfully upon her heart. She must be a happy woman who could inspire such a being with love;—but to be the life-long—the life-loved companion of such a being, must truly be the perfection of human felicity! So thought Jane Ashenhurst—and let

her not be misjudged for so thinking—while her jewelled dress was removed, and her long fair hair was smoothed down for the night's repose.

She awoke with the idea of Mr. Vigors' wife in her mind: she must be beautiful—she must be all that could make a woman the fit companion for the most intellectual, the most warm-hearted and high-minded of God's creatures!

CHAPTER XI.

The next day, to escape the throng of callers, many of whom were admitted to pay their respects to Mrs. Ashenhurst and the general, Jane walked out into a favourite pleached walk, screened from the wind, and which, even at this early season, exhibited signs of coming spring—budding trees, and a thickly-gemmed border of primroses and violets. Here she had walked but for a short time, when Mr. Vigors appeared, excusing himself for interrupting her privacy, by saying, that as that morning his visit was to her, he was most fortunate in finding her alone,

and hoped she would not refuse him her company. Jane blushed deeply. Mr. Vigors led by the hand a little boy, whom the next moment he presented.

"This is the being of whom I spoke last night, —my little son. Will Miss Ashenhurst receive him kindly?"

The boy was the most beautiful Jane had ever seen. He was dressed in a complete suit of dark purple velvet, with a black velvet cap and feather; a bright-eyed, fair, but thoughtful child; his features finely chiselled, and more formed than those of children commonly are. He strikingly resembled his father; except that for the deep, dark eye of the father, the child's were of a full violet blue,—eyes beaming with the most inexpressible tenderness and love. His hair, which was of a pale gold colour, much like Jane's own, fell full and curling over a collar of needlework, which was fastened round his beautiful throat with a diamond button. For the first moment Jane experienced that sensation so happily described by Wordsworth,—

His beauty made her glad.

The next, as the boy looked into her face with

innocent wonder, and his trusting eyes kindled up in affectionate expression so like his father's, the truth flashed on her soul, and tears filled her own eyes as she stooped down and kissed his fair forehead, — the child's mother was dead; Mr. Vigors was a widower!

"Thank you, Miss Ashenhurst," said Mr. Vigors, "for receiving my child with so much kindness. I was not deceived,—I knew you were all goodness!"

"He is a dear child!" was Jane's involuntary reply.

"God bless you!" said he; and then after a moment's pause he went on, his voice becoming more irresistibly sweet and thrilling as he spoke: "I never thought till last night of giving a second mother to my boy.—I will be frank, Miss Ashenhurst, it is necessary to me, and, I believe, must be most agreeable to you. You have many lovers who seek you for your riches,—some you must also have who seek you for your virtues and attractions. Fortune is no object with me—I have more already than I need, therefore I belong not to the first class; but I am proud to acknowledge myself of the latter. It is, however, for the sake

of this child that I am most anxious to connect myself with you. Can you, dearest Miss Ashenhurst, accept such devotion as this? so warm, so sincere, pretending so little, yet implying so much?"

Jane took the child's hand in hers, but she made no reply.

The father received it, however, as a sign of acceptance, and, seizing the other, pressed it warmly to his lips.

"Nay, sir," said Jane, suddenly disengaging her hand, "I must speak. Oh! there is so much to tell you, and I know not how to say it!"

"Speak on, dearest Miss Ashenhurst," he said, as she paused in the deepest agitation.

"I have been so surprised into this acquaintance, and I know not how to act, nor what to say. I am, I will not deny, warmly interested by you and for this child; but I am not at liberty to act for myself," said she with an emotion she could not conceal.

"Certainly not," was Mr. Vigors' reply. "Let me but know you interested for me and my boy, and what can oppose our happiness? If fortune

is an object with your uncle, I have enough to satisfy even him ;—if family and connexions with Mrs. Ashenhurst, there too can be no exception."

"My uncle has prejudices," said Jane.

"How?—what can they be? General Dubois can have no prejudice against me—till within the last week he has never seen me; nor are my family or connexions impeachable in the slightest degree. I cannot, I will not think it possible! Dearest Miss Ashenhurst, you shall not tell me of prejudices, I will hear none from your lips,—for this one morning let me be happy. If sorrow and disappointment are to come, let them not be from you; but I cannot suspect that they can come!" So saying, he linked Jane's arm into his, holding her hand in his, and bidding the child take the other.

The contagion of his hopeful spirit seized Jane, and she felt as if difficulties must vanish before the influence of such a being as this. "And I too," thought she, "will be happy for this one morning, come what will on the morrow!"

"No, no, Mr. Vigors," said Jane, at length, interrupting the eloquent outpouring of his new happiness; "you shall not talk thus to me! Talk to me of your child, of yourself, on any general

subject. Heaven knows, but, spite of myself, I tremble to hear you talk thus!"

"Run on, my boy, and look at those sweet flowers," said he to Herbert, disengaging the hand which Jane held.

"Gather me a handful of violets," said Jane as the little hand was drawn from hers.

The obedient and happy boy left them, each following him with admiring eyes as, with the grace of a young antelope, he bounded on before them.

The strangeness of this new friendship irresistibly struck her, and she remarked that that time yesterday they had not exchanged a word.

"It does not require long time to make two consonant spirits acquainted," was his reply. "I loved you the moment I saw you; I, who for the last four years have had but one sentiment in my soul,—sorrow for the dead."

"It is a sacred subject," said Jane.

"I have never spoken her name since the day she died—I have never spoken of her to any but my boy,—it *is* a sacred subject! yet I feel no desecration in telling you of my Beatrice—how fair, how angelic she was,—how like a

dream of heaven were the short twelvemonths of our wedded life! Beatrice was in her twentieth year when she died,—I was three years older. Our love was the growth of our lives. How different from *ours*, dearest Jane! and yet in spirit the same,—the same confiding union of heart, less the growth of passion than of affection;—yet, I was unlike my present self,—full of confidence and joy, without a tinge of sorrow,—believing in, not hoping from, the future. She was a joyous, social being, filling all places with gladness; like me, she had never known sorrow. How happy was her father, how happy was the whole household in her presence! the very sound of her voice, the very tread of her foot, brought joy with them. She passed in and out of the house like sunshine! Pardon me, dearest Jane," said he, as he passed his hand over his brow, "pardon this unlover-like subject; but, Heaven knows, I can give you no greater proof of my love, my devotion, than by unlocking my heart on this sacred subject! Beatrice would have loved you! The boy strongly resembles her;—the same eyes, the same oval of countenance, the same hair; but above all, the same trusting, innocent, and happy

spirit, though he has grown too thoughtful under my tuition." Mr. Vigors ceased, and the lovers walked for some time in silence, the hearts of both filled with the tenderest emotion.

"My heart blesses you for this confidence," said Jane, at length, in an agitated voice; "but the subject is too painful for you."

"No," he replied firmly; "I can speak to you of her,—I can tell you how dear, how deservedly dear she was: the subject which has been locked up in my soul for four years, and which her father and I never dared to speak upon, I can unburden to you even after one day's acquaintance; and yet I have not lived in solitude. I have been through Europe,—in Paris, Vienna, Rome, and London,—seeking, not shunning society; yet, in the multitudes of women whom I have seen, the beautiful, the intellectual, the accomplished, I have never breathed one sentiment on this subject to one of them. They only made me feel how different they were to her: on the contrary, the same cheerful-spiritedness, the same high-toned feeling, the same integrity and simplicity of heart, which bound her to me, and will keep her memory precious to my dying

day, made you irresistibly attractive! I know the felicity which affectionate intercourse, daily and hourly communion of kindred and confiding spirits, can create! I know that the purity, the peace of such a life, can only be surpassed by existence in a happier state of being! Oh! but to see you as happy, as entirely and perfectly happy, as was my Beatrice; to be assured that my boy would never know how deep a loss he has otherwise sustained,—would leave me nothing to desire!

"But I am selfish—let me hear you speak, dearest Miss Ashenhurst; sorrows you can have had none—let me hear of your happy life. Nothing is more beautiful, more interesting to my contemplation than the uneventful happiness of a young innocent being!"

"Nay, Mr. Vigors," said Jane, "if I am to try to tell my story, whether eventful or uneventful, I cannot do it. If we meet again in happiness, there will be sufficient time for that."

"Why, dearest girl, will you forebode evil? We shall meet again, and, please God, a life of happiness lies before us!"

"Look at that sweet child kissing the flowers,"

said Jane; and disengaging herself from her lover, she ran to his side. "Oh, why do you kiss the flowers?" she asked.

"They are so sweet," said the boy: "will you have them?"

"If you will exchange them for a kiss," said Jane, taking the offered flowers, and kissing him on his red lips, and then on his fair forehead.

"But papa must have some—you must give papa some flowers, if you please," said he, rising on tiptoe to reach the violets, which Jane held playfully higher and higher.

"You are a brave boy," said she; "but you have given the flowers to me, and I shall give some to papa."

"Oh!" said the little fellow, perfectly satisfied.

"There are papa's flowers," said she, giving half of them into his father's hand.

Mr. Vigors returned his own affectionate look, and pressed the flowers to his lips.

"Oh, papa kisses the violets!" shouted the boy with a burst of childish merriment.

At that moment the bell rang announcing the hour of dressing.

"I shall see General Dubois and your mother to-morrow," said Mr. Vigors.

"No, no, not to-morrow!" was Jane's earnest reply, "not to-morrow! Why are you so impatient of our friendship?"

"Why not to-morrow, my dear Miss Ashenhurst?"

"It is Friday," said she, smiling, "if I must invent a reason; and you cannot think of risking so much on a Friday!"

"Risking!—no, no," said he, "we will be perfectly happy to-morrow!" and pressing her hand to his lips, and begging her to kiss his child, he parted from her.

Jane walked to the house with slow steps, amazed at the strange engagement into which she had as it were involuntarily entered — entered without sufficient reflection, in the very despair of its accomplishment.

"What new sorrow and trouble hangs over my head!" thought she, as she took her seat at table. But the conversation was so unusually cheerful—her mother and uncle seemed so perfectly themselves, that she felt confident they had no idea of the interview she had had with Mr. Vigors.

"And who knows," thought she in the course of the evening, as she recalled that fascinating voice, that noble person, and those engaging manners, and remembered moreover that he was wealthy and well connected, though she knew not how or to whom,—"who knows but my uncle may forego this prejudice, which is in itself so unreasonable, so unfeeling!" The perfections of her lover wrought powerfully on her own imagination, and Jane persuaded herself that all would be well.

"I wish I could see him this morning," was Jane's waking thought, as she opened her eyes from a strange perplexity of dream, in which Brian Livingstone and Mr. Vigors—now one and the same, and now two separate persons, with a fearfully distinct individuality, had haunted her through the night;—"I wish I could see him, to prevent his speaking to my uncle to day!—for surely I might come to love him, even as well as I once loved Brian Livingstone. How strange that I should have dreamed thus! how strange too that at first he should have appeared so strongly to resemble Brian Livingstone! yet in reality how different they are! Mr. Vigors would never have demurred and

doubted, and then at last have given me up, as Brian has done! And yet," continued she, mentally musing, while her maid was assisting in the operation of dressing, "what happier should I have been had Brian come forward? it would only have caused fresh misery!—Nay, nay," mused she, correcting herself, "it would have proved Brian the true-hearted, noble being I believed him: better any pang than to find those we love best unworthy!"—How bitter were these thoughts! Jane dismissed her maid, and finished her toilet alone, that she might indulge her own feelings. "Brian Livingstone unworthy!" how noble then seemed the frank-hearted but unhappy Mr. Vigors! "And yet," thought she, "what a fresh and cruel disappointment even now awaits both him and me!

"Oh, I am unfortunate!" cried the poor girl, giving way to her emotion, "subjected as I am to unreasonable prejudice and senseless pride, and doomed as I am to wound that noble being! Far better had I been a free, though a poor maiden at Harbury! I might then, had circumstances so willed it, have been the happy wife of Mr. Vigors."

CHAPTER XII.

In the course of the morning, Mrs. Ashenhurst entered her daughter's apartment, and sat down with a countenance full of important business.

"Why, my dear," said she, "this is a most unfortunate affair—to think of Mr. Vigors having been married before!"

Jane absolutely felt faint, but her mother went on.

"I cannot think what is to be done! it would be so good a match!"

"Is Mr. Vigors here?" asked Jane, with an effort that almost choked her.

"Yes, love, unless he is just gone. He is a charming young man, and with such good connexions!—own cousin to Lord Napier; and his wife was the daughter and heiress of Sir William Eland. But there's the misfortune! I cannot think why he should have married before!"

"Nay," said Jane, "why should any one make that an objection?"

"Well, my love, you know it is your uncle's

way. I have no doubt but he has some reason, and a good reason too, for objecting. It is unfortunate, I allow; but I suppose we must submit—I am sure it is our duty to do so."

"It is an abuse of the word to apply it thus. It is a duty my uncle owes to us, since he has made us dependant on him, to overcome prejudices as unreasonable as this is! Far better had he left us in our humble independence at Harbury,—we should then have been happy!"

"My love," said her mother, "you forget that *we* sought out the general, and are infinitely obliged to him for receiving us in the manner he has; and I am amazed at your talking of him in this way. And as to Mr. Vigors, I have no doubt you will have quite as good offers! Dear me! Mr. Vigors is not the only man in the world! A young lady who is known to be the heiress of General Dubois will be sought after by the best men in the land!"

"Dearest mother," replied Jane, "it is not the mere circumstance of being splendidly married that would satisfy me: I cannot believe there are many such men as Mr. Vigors."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Ashenhurst, laughing, "I

can remember when you said the same of Mr. Livingstone; and since you have seen two models of perfection, you may see twenty! I have no doubt, love, in twelve months you will find a suitor, as much to your taste as either of these, without his belonging to any of the interdicted classes."

"These are most unjustifiable, not to say wicked prejudices," observed Jane earnestly; "and I am amazed, dear mother, that you do not attempt to overcome them in the mind of the general."

"Nay, love, make the attempt yourself. I do not pretend to have any right to influence him: I think it our duty to acquiesce. I certainly should have been glad, for poor Mr. Vigors' sake, that he had not been married before; but I have no right to influence your uncle's judgment: at least, that is my view of the case; if you think differently, you can try. Only I beseech you, love, do nothing rash or violent—I know the general better than you do!"

Presently afterwards a servant requested them to walk to the saloon, where General Dubois wished to see them. They found him apparent-

ly in high good-humour, reclining as usual on his couch.

"Well, Miss Ashenhurst," said he, as Jane, pale and agitated, entered the room which her lover had just left, "you have run through the interdicted classes—a fox-hunter, a parson, and a widower, and I hope next time you will start from clear ground! Be so obliging as not to give me the trouble of saying 'no' the next time; for, upon my soul! this was a pretty young fellow, and I was half sorry for him myself."

Jane could not have replied for the world. Had Brian Livingstone then absolutely been rejected? This was a new subject of doubt and wonder, and for a few seconds she forgot the immediate cause of disappointment and anxiety.

"Come, come," said the general, "do not let us have such melancholy looks. You should imitate your mother, Miss Ashenhurst;—why, upon my life, you look more cast down than Mr. Vigors himself! By-the-by, that young man has a fine spirit, after all: I should very well like to see him at the head of a troop—a noble figure for a uniform! a fine spirit he

has, on my soul!" and the general laughed in uncontrollable merriment.

"How long has Mr. Vigors been gone?" asked Mrs. Ashenhurst.

"Not two minutes before you entered."

"Uncle," said Jane at length, and with great agitation, "may I know your decision with regard to Mr. Vigors?"

"To be sure, my fair niece, you are welcome to know it—that you must look out for another husband."

"May I ask why?"

"Why?—indeed!" said the general, in a tone between anger and mirth. "Why? forsooth!—a pretty question, Miss Jane: do you know why your last lover was refused? Come, there 's a Roland for an Oliver!"

"Mr. Vigors is a man of family and fortune," said Mrs. Ashenhurst in deprecating tone.

"My niece is not going to be any man's second wife," was his reply.

"Dearest uncle," said Jane, "I would not willingly displease you, but——"

"*But!*" interrupted the general, starting up from his couch with a burst of rage that terrified

Mrs. Ashenhurst and silenced Jane; "who dares oppose a *but* to my will! By Heaven, it shall not be! Why must there be more opposition on your part now than on a former occasion?—how is this man better than the parson? I thought *he* was an old and valued friend—an old lover before you came here. *This* man you never saw till Wednesday, and yet you now come to me with your *buts!*"

"I never knew," said Jane with desperate courage, "that the other *had* been rejected!"

"God bless my soul, Miss Ashenhurst," said he, stamping with passion, "what does *your* knowing or not signify to me!"

"Oh, sir, it signifies much to me!" replied the agitated girl.

"It is enough for you that I say yes or no!" continued he in the impetuosity of rage; "I expect submission from you; or if it please you better, you can leave Denborough Park!"

Mrs. Ashenhurst burst into tears, protesting that any opposition to his will was the farthest from her thoughts, and that she was confident all he said was right. Jane sat with her hands clasped together, unable to speak or weep.

"Miss Ashenhurst," said the general at length,

in a milder tone, after he had taken several turns across the room, "let me have no more nonsense of this kind! Your duty is plain before you—to submit."

"To be sure, my dear general, it is her bounden duty; and I will answer for her, that it will be her pleasure also."

Without vouchsafing any reply, the general left the apartment.

"My dear love, how can you be so headstrong! Only to think of your displeasing your uncle in this way, so good as he has always been to you! You make me perfectly miserable," said she, bursting again into tears.

"Mother," said Jane calmly, "has Mr. Livingstone actually been refused?"

"Oh dear yes, love, and I am sure it was done as nicely as could be; there was no rage about it, nor any trouble. I wish to goodness this Mr. Vigors had never come!"

"Why did I not know of Mr. Livingstone's proposals?" asked Jane.

"My dear, how can you talk so! You were at Wilton at the time—when you were there in the autumn. I am sure you ought to be very

much obliged to me for sparing you all the vexation and disagreeable of it; you know you could no more have had him than poor Mr. Vigors. I am sure I have always been so anxious to spare you any distress."

"Dearest mother," said Jane, "it might be well meant, but it was mistaken kindness; I should not have suffered more from resigning him to your will than I have done in the belief that he had deserted me."

"Really, Jane, you are so strange!" said her mother; "but I wish you would let the subject drop—there can be no good in talking of it now."

"No, dear mother," replied Jane, with a countenance pale, but a manner perfectly calm, "I cannot let it drop thus—I must know more! How did *he* bear it?"

"Oh, exceedingly well! I am sure, love, I never thought so highly of Mr. Livingstone before. He saw perfectly well how the case stood, and that it was no use making any fuss about it; nothing could have been more reasonable than he was, and I wish, love, you would only take example by him."

"Mother," said Jane, with a solemnity that startled her, "dearest mother, do not mislead me! Do him not the injustice to say so. Brian Livingstone, since he has come forward, could not have resigned me with indifference."

"Well, love, since you appear to know so much better than me, why do you ask me? But," added she, softening the tone of displeasure with which she had spoken, "I tell you he is a man of sense, and knows the insuperable barrier which your altered fortune throws between you. His addresses, I believe, were merely a point of honour; he had no idea, he could have none, that they would be received!"

"Mother," cried Jane, clasping her hands in an agony, "why will you trifle with me? You know not how important it is to my peace, to my mode of action with regard to Mr. Vigors, that I should not be deceived! Heaven forgive me for thinking you would deceive me! but these never could be Brian Livingstone's feelings! Tell me, dearest mother,—I conjure you, whatever took place, nothing will wound me like uncertainty,—I dread my own surmises!"

"Dear love, you really frighten me! What can

you mean? how can it matter to you now? And besides, I have nothing to tell you: I am sure Mr. Livingstone gave me credit for speaking truth, and it is hard that you cannot do so too!"

"Oh! forgive me, dearest mother; but you do not know my feelings: I owe justice to Mr. Livingstone, I have wronged him so long! You know that he has left England?"

"Well, love, and what then? Many a man goes abroad; and what more likely than that he should take his pleasure now he can afford it?"

"Pleasure!" repeated Jane in a tone of unwonted bitterness; "pleasure!—oh, no! I know him too well to believe he is gone for pleasure."

"Well, love," again said her mother petulantly, "if you know so well, why do you ask me?"

The poor girl covered her face with both her hands, and, without shedding a tear, bowed her head to her knees in mental agony. Mrs. Ashenhurst, thinking the while how beautiful she looked in that attitude, felt as much tenderness towards her as was in her nature.

"Come, dear love," said she, "do not give way to such distress; I am sure you have no

cause but for happiness; and think what good fortune lies all round you, and everybody loving you as they do."

Jane lifted up her marble-like countenance, and repeated her mother's word 'happiness.' "Happiness!" continued she in a tone of heart-anguish; "to have driven Brian Livingstone from his native country in the belief that I refused him even my friendship! Happiness! to inflict misery on another noble being, who has already only known too much sorrow. No, no, this is not happiness!"

Poor Mrs. Ashenhurst was at her wit's end. "The more I say," thought she, "the worse I make matters, — I will e'en say nothing; there is no fear but this grief will work its own cure. I cannot think who Jane takes after; neither poor dear Captain Ashenhurst nor myself ever made such troubles of nothing. Well, the worst I wish poor Mr. Vigors is, that he never had come near the place." So mused and murmured she, as she wandered about from room to room, declaring to herself that it was the most miserable day she had ever spent at Denborough Park.

CHAPTER XIII.

In the course of the morning Jane received a note from Mr. Vigors requesting an interview. Mrs. Ashenhurst warmly remonstrated against such a thing, but Jane was firm in granting it.

"Well, love, if you are determined to turn us out of this place, I cannot help it: remember, it is your own doing."

"My dear mother, we had better leave this place than be thus subjected; we degrade ourselves by submitting thus."

"What! and go back to Harbury? What would everybody say? what would the Parkinsons say? You terrify me, Jane! How can you fly thus in the face of your duty?"

"If I thought my duty forbad it, I would not do it. But, dear mother, this one interview I owe to Mr. Vigors even more truly than obedience to my uncle."

"I cannot think how it is, Jane," replied her mother, "that you see things so differently to everybody else. However, if you are determined

to offend your uncle, you must understand I will have nothing to do with it. I will go to Wilton, or somewhere; and remember, Jane, I insist upon it that you give this Mr. Vigors no encouragement"

"How can I," said Jane mournfully, "feeling as I do what I owe to Mr. Livingstone?"

Mrs. Ashenhurst did not understand her daughter; but she thought it was no use asking for her meaning,—it was enough that this interview was to be final with Mr. Vigors. "Now be sure you do not keep him long, and do not let your uncle see him," were, therefore, her parting injunctions.

Accordingly, in half an hour's time the carriage bore away the trouble-laden Mrs. Ashenhurst, and Jane was left alone to the performance of the most painful duty.

The calm that succeeded the departure of her mother was of the greatest possible benefit to her. She nerved herself for what she had to do, the sacrificing this new love, less in obedience to the exactions of those about her, than in justice to her outraged affection for her early and ill-used lover. "It is," she inwardly exclaimed, "a difficult, a most painful duty, to inflict sorrow,

to withdraw hope, and this to one of the most generous, the most noble beings the earth holds. Alas! it may be to subject myself to misconstruction. But no, I wrong him; his pure and generous nature will understand, will accept my motives! I will unshrinkingly do what I believe right; and may Heaven strengthen me!" ejaculated she, as she awaited her lover's approach in her own apartments, where she was in no danger of interruption.

Mr. Vigors came; he looked extremely pale, yet his manner was perfectly calm, and even as he began his voice was cheerful.

"You were right, dear Jane," said he; "Friday was an unlucky day,—I had to encounter unlooked-for prejudices; but all this enhances your goodness—I owe you eternal thanks for this interview."

"My uncle's determination," said Jane, "as you may suppose, has not astonished me, and yet it has given me infinite pain."

"The general has yet to learn—a hard lesson truly," replied Mr. Vigors,—"sympathy with human sorrow; but your sentiments, dear Jane, cannot be affected by it."

"I will not deny that my heart is warmly

interested for you; but circumstances are too strong for me. Indeed, Mr. Vigors, I have had to endure much."

"Dearest Jane," returned he tenderly, "why need you submit to these prejudices? Heaven knows, I would not counsel disobedience to your natural guardian, but——"

"Oh! do not talk thus, Mr. Vigors; it cannot, cannot be!"

"If fortune, if connexions—incidental things which weigh as nothing with me," continued he, "influence Mrs. Ashenhurst, as I believe they do, I can offer these. I can offer you a home, less splendid it is true than this, but still a noble home. Would to Heaven I could see you there, dearest girl! What a world of happiness we should make even this!" said he, with his most winning voice, and pressing her hand to his lips.

"No, no!" said Jane, disengaging her hand; "it is a sin in me to listen thus."

"Dearest Miss Ashenhurst, you owe no obedience to your uncle's prejudices. Assert your natural independence; if your uncle be a reasonable man, he cannot esteem you for such weak

submission. Pardon the term,—but if he be unreasonable, why must you suffer? Confide yourself to me, dearest of women. I am not one to kneel, and vow, and utter protestations;—in the sincerity of the warmest affection, I can but offer you a heart that has bled, but which is yet capable of the most ardent, the most enduring love. Shake yourself free of these prejudices, in which you are too noble to partake, and be mine. Oh! to see you as happy, to make you as happy, as one who was young and beautiful, and good, like yourself! Pardon me, dearest Jane; but I cannot be with you, and not be reminded of the past. I forget that you cannot know the compliment it implies."

"I can, I can!" said Jane, suppressing an emotion which seemed almost like death,—"I can; but, oh! I have a terrible duty before me!" and clasping her hands in an attitude of unspeakable sorrow, "My soul bleeds," she said, "to assure you that I cannot return your affection."

Mr. Vigors started; and Jane, compelling herself to be calm, went on, "Oh! let me consider you as a brother,—let me open my soul to you!"

"Say on, dearest Miss Ashenhurst," said he, in utter amazement, and distressed by her pale, agitated countenance,—"Say on; you may command me to listen even to my own death-warrant."

"It is an extraordinary confession I am about to make," she resumed, and especially considering the short time of our acquaintance; but I believe you can understand my motives and feelings, and I believe also that I may confide to you circumstances which must be told to explain my conduct." Jane paused, as if scarce knowing how to proceed, and her lover sat in breathless suspense.

"You honour me, dearest Miss Ashenhurst," at length he answered; "your confidence cannot be abused; speak freely as to a brother,—you can have nothing to confess which a brother would wish unheard."

"Thank you," said Jane, enforcing composure, "thank you for this encouragement,—I need it indeed! Perhaps I may be wrong," she resumed after a momentary pause; "but it is in the desire to do right; and, at this moment, I have no one to consult but my own feelings, and I

have no hope of clearing myself in your eyes but by placing the utmost confidence in you. But, to be brief, I never knew till this morning that an old and beloved friend had been rejected by my uncle, only lately, on the sole plea of one of those prejudices of which I am doomed to be the victim."

"A clergyman," said Mr. Vigors, "it was mentioned."

"A man," said Jane, "who would have honoured your virtues and won your esteem. I believed, till this morning, that he had resigned me quietly to my new connexions. I cannot tell you how such a belief wounded me; but I was unjust to him. It would be additional injustice were I to enter into new engagements, especially in opposition to my friends, in opposition to those very prejudices for which he was rejected. I know him too well not to believe he has endured much, particularly believing me accessory, as I think he may. It is true he is gone abroad; it may be true also that he is now reconciled, and in all probability we never shall meet again. But, I despair of making my full meaning intelligible, — I despair of giving the full weight to

arguments which are conclusive to my own feelings and sense of honour;" said she, the consciousness of the confession she had made changing the marble-like earnestness of her countenance to a deep blush.

A silence of some minutes succeeded. Mr. Vigors, during the latter part of this confession, had leaned his brow on his hand, and he still remained so, as in a state of the deepest abstraction. Jane watched him with the most intense anxiety, dreading lest she had committed herself unwisely, or outstepped female delicacy. She saw his fine countenance agitated, and full of the most eloquent sorrow; and, as she looked on him, she was filled with admiration and deep sympathy. It was a dangerous moment; — Brian Livingstone and Mr. Vigors alternated with the exactest balance,—a word could turn the scale, and that word was spoken.

"You are a noble creature—you have done perfectly right—you have acted honourably; I must confess it, though I lose you by the confession;" said he, looking at her with the utmost tenderness.

The reaction was irresistible—the next moment her face was buried in her hands, her head bowed

to the silken cushions of the sofa, and she was relieving her overwrought feelings by tears. Mr. Vigors the while bent over her with such tender and affectionate admiration and pity as her guardian angel might have felt.

"Pardon me," at length she said, raising her brow from the cushions on which it had lain; "I ought not to give way to this weakness; but your goodness—your nobility overcame me: can you forgive me?"

"I shall bless you to my dying day!" was Mr. Vigors' emphatic reply, and taking her hand and pressing it tenderly to his lips he seemed about to depart. Jane took a cornelian heart, suspended by a small gold chain from her neck. "Give this," said she, "to your little Herbert, and do not let him forget me: I will treasure his violets," added she, with a tremulous voice, "among my most precious things!"

Without speaking a word, he pressed the trinket to his lips, and giving her a momentary glance, in which she read the fulness of soul-rending agony, he left the room. The time of weakness now came. The sacrifice had been made, but the strength which had nerved her for

the sacrifice was gone. In the moment of natural reaction, she seemed wantonly to have thrown away this noble being for a point of honour. "Could Brian indeed," thought she, "have been cold and indifferent—willing to give me up without a pang? and do I for this lingering attachment—for a romantic sense of justice perhaps, strip myself thus, and cast that generous and noble creature back upon the solitude of his own sorrow!"

These doubtings and almost self-accusations were the consequent result of her excited feelings; she again buried her face in the cushions, and wept those passionate tears which women alone weep, and which are given in mercy as an outlet for their emotion.

CHAPTER XIV.

When Mrs. Ashenhurst returned from her friends, she found Jane laid upon her couch, her head throbbing violently, her eyes oppressed by the light, and a burning fever consuming her whole frame. Bitterly did Mrs. Ashenhurst

blame herself for leaving her daughter, and many and loud were her lamentations over her. The physician was sent for, and pronounced her seriously ill; and then the poor mother's distress was beyond bounds. The next morning she was declared to be worse; nurses were sent for, and Mrs. Ashenhurst, unable to rest in any one place, stole from room to room in her noiseless Indian slippers, wringing her hands and weeping, and wearying the physician with ceaseless inquiries after his patient.

General Dubois at first appeared haughty and indifferent; but as the day advanced, and the physician still sat, hour after hour, in the apartment adjoining her chamber, and the shrill agonised voice of the poor girl, now highly delirious, was heard occasionally to ring through the silence of the house, even he was detected inquiring three times in the course of the evening how she was going on.

Another physician was called in on the third day, and the rumour of her illness spread through all the neighbourhood. Nothing could exceed the interest that was excited: she, so young and beautiful, who had borne her honours so meekly,

had charmed every heart into love and every eye into admiration,—who had, too, but so lately been the admired of hundreds of eyes,—now lay insensible in the very grasp of death; and so numerous and incessant were the inquiries after her, that a porter was stationed at the gate to answer them, receiving every hour the physician's report of her state. Mrs. Ashenhurst felt and loved the flattery of all these attentions even in the midst of her distress.

At length the physicians pronounced that all would be decided by the turn of a few hours. No one of the whole household went to bed that night; the general himself sat in his chamber, wrapped in his Indian dressing-gown, his untasted hookah beside him, to watch over the critical period, and even as the hour approached was seen to steal to the ante-room of her apartment without venturing an inquiry. Mrs. Ashenhurst sat in her chair at the bed-side subdued by anxiety into perfect quiescence, studying the countenances of those about her, but feeling as if even certainty of death could not make her more perfectly wretched than she was. Throughout that long, anxious night, too, walked another

watcher, wrapped in his cloak, to and fro within sight of her windows. This, it is needless to say, was Mr. Vigors,—the truest-hearted, the most intensely anxious of all her friends. The trinket she had given for his boy rested on his heart, and many a time in the course of the night was pressed to his lips. No astronomer ever watched the transit of a planet with more anxiety than he watched the feeble line of light that marked the almost-closed shutters of her chamber-windows, and the stronger continuous light that burned in the adjoining room where the physicians remained to watch over the crisis.

He saw the steady light burning; but as the hour approached, shadows passed the curtained windows in the direction of the chamber: the physicians were on the watch. Oh, the awful passing on of those moments! The memory of another sick chamber—the chamber of death, came over him; he saw, as if brought together before him, the being who then died, and the one who might now be dying. His heart bowed before the mighty grief which seemed beyond human strength to bear, and among the trees of the garden he offered up the most earnest of prayers.

The hour was passed—another succeeded, and the physicians pronounced the patient to be in that state when, though danger remained, they could yet give hope. The joyful tidings were communicated throughout the house. The general smoked his hookah, and ordered his valet to prepare his bed. Mrs. Ashenhurst gave to each of the physicians a purse of gold for their tidings, and said she would now go to rest. Lights passed from room to room, and Mr. Vigors, believing the omen happy, presented himself at the door of the servants' hall, frightening several of them into the belief that they had seen a ghost before he could get the blessed intelligence that Miss Ashenhurst was certainly better.

The next day Jane woke to a dreamy consciousness of some fearful catastrophe, feeble in body and feeble in mind. O the dreadfulness of such waking! Where was she?—what had happened? were the strange questionings of her mind, without the power to give the questions words. Throughout the day she alternately slept that profound sleep which, though in its effects so sanative, is so painful to wake from; and then lay in that state of gathering consciousness, often

more full of suffering than bodily pain, the struggling as it were of disjointed knowledge with mental feebleness.

Day after day went on, and the youth and natural strength of the patient overcame disease. Jane sat up in her bed, or reclined on her couch, and received her uncle, or her more intimate acquaintance, Lady Cornbury and a few others, to a daily levee. The memory of all the past was now fully restored; Brian Livingstone's addresses, and the strange events of that parting with Mr. Vigors. A chastened sorrow lay on her spirit when she thought of him, but the approving consciousness of having done right cheered and consoled her nevertheless. She longed to know yet dared not ask where he was, what had happened to him, or whether any one had seen him. Many a time was the question on her lips, but she was spared the pain of asking it by a conversation which passed in her room.

"Only to think of Mr. Vigors making so short a visit!" remarked one lady.

"What, is he gone!" exclaimed another. "What a fine melancholy creature he was!"

"The most beautiful eyes—the most interest-

ing man; I protest I could have cried when he was gone," said a young lady.

"And, oh!" asked another, "did you see his little boy?—such a love!"

"I cannot think why he went so soon,—I thought he was come here for the winter," wondered the second lady.

"Lady Doyne told me," replied a third who yet had not spoken, "that she was sure his spirits were worse than when he came down; she thought he was someway reminded of poor Mrs. Vigors; and she said, though they were all so sorry to part with him—for he really is the most delightful companion, and makes himself so amiable in a house—and that sweet child too, they were all so fond of him!—yet she was glad for him to go where he could see more general society—to Bath or London. It is a pity he lets his poor wife distress him so much; and she, you know, has been dead four years."

"But she certainly was a most beautiful creature!" said the first lady; "I saw her somewhere soon after they were married.—Oh, at Clifton. We were there with poor Mr. Wilbank, and they came with her father, Sir William

Eland; they all lived together—and what a beautiful pair they were!—and he, such a benign, cheerful old man, so proud of his daughter and son-in-law. I am sure everybody admired them, and nobody was thought anything of but Mrs. Vigors;—and yet she was the simplest-dressed woman there—and they used to run up and down the cliffs, she and her husband, just like two school-children."

"Oh, you are certainly tired, dear Miss Ashenhurst," said one of the ladies, turning from the talking group to Jane's chair; "you look quite overdone."

"Bless me! and we have been talking at this rate, and never thinking of you, Miss Ashenhurst!"

"Let me ring for a nurse," "Let me divide you an orange," "Do smell at this vinegarette," overwhelmed her on all sides; and to be rid of her persecutors, and to indulge her own feelings, Jane allowed that she was tired and wished for repose.

All this time we have said nothing of Sir Harbottle Grimstone. The fact is, there was nothing to say. He returned to his home, after

the last time he figured in these pages, in one of those brutal passions which vented itself in oaths and outrage upon every being round him, and finally worked itself off in a drunken carouse. The consequence of his rejected suit was, as may be imagined, only greater hatred for the nabob: whenever he went among his jovial fox-hunting companions, the nabob was the subject of his unmitigated abuse and of his vulgar ridicule; yet since that time they had never met, at least never come in contact. Sir Harbottle, though a swaggering boaster, a most insolent asserter of his own superiority among his own set, had had already too much experience of the nabob's sarcasm, and dreaded too sincerely the world's opinion, which he knew always went against him in his enemy's presence, not to studiously avoid meeting him. Another cause of the greater infrequency of their meeting was, that since the ladies had become inmates of his house, the general's circle of intimates was much narrowed. Neither Mrs. Ashenhurst nor her daughter went into mixed society — they belonged to the *élite* of the county, and almost unconsciously to himself he adopted their cus-

toms: yet was not his dislike nor his ridicule of Sir Harbottle one whit abated. It was a standing joke with the visiters at Denborough Park that Sir Harbottle Grimstone always came on with the dessert, and, to the infinite annoyance of the ladies, the story of the nabob's triumph was invariably told.

Thus much said, let us return to the more interesting persons of our story.

CHAPTER XV.

No sooner was the anxiety of Mrs. Ashenhurst set at rest with respect to her daughter's life, than she was seized by a new cause of solicitude —fears for her beauty. That Jane should be restored to her less beautiful, less generally attractive than formerly, was an idea that filled her with the most exquisite concern; and every day she studied the poor girl's countenance to discover whether, in place of her former bloom, she acquired any new graces of a more delicate character.

The general too had similar feelings, though

with him they never amounted to anxieties; he merely felt that she could not be equally interesting to him were she less beautiful. But they might have spared their anxieties and conjectures; Jane's chiefest beauty was of feature and expression, not dependent on the bloom of unabated health; and as the weeks progressed and her former strength was restored, if she had lost somewhat of the hilarity that characterised the Hebe-like countenance that beamed and brightened first on the general, she had gained what was infinitely more touching—an expression of deeper thought and sentiment. In truth, Jane Ashenhurst had never been so entirely beautiful as now, because *mind* had never been equally developed before.

Both mother and uncle were beginning to be satisfied on this subject, when it was confirmed by a gratuitous remark of Lady Cornbury's, "that Miss Ashenhurst was really lovelier than ever!" Nothing more was needed. If the impassive soul of her ladyship was aware of the fact, and could even be excited into an exclamation of surprise by it, there need be no fear of its now making its full impression on eyes ever open to

detect female beauty. This important subject therefore being so satisfactorily settled, the general informed his kinswomen that their attendance would be required by him in his customary visit to London, whence he should return during the summer.

To Mrs. Ashenhurst this was the glorification of life; especially as her friends the Cornburys were there at present;—a most unusual event, and only brought about by certain overtures to reconciliation with the contumacious nephew, who, as we have intimated before, notwithstanding the ten years' breach, had occupied the place of a spoiled and undutiful child in the hearts of his noble relations.

Mrs. Ashenhurst rejoiced as much in this reunion as Lady Cornbury herself. She had certain ambitious projects respecting this unknown personage; and a more favourable opportunity to act upon them, she thought, could not occur than the present; for though she was by no means unaware of her daughter's decision and firmness of character, she so sincerely believed that even *she* could not resist the united influences of rank and fashion, especially when she was assailed,

at the same time by the idolatry which would be paid in the capital to the beautiful heiress of General Dubois, that she made sure of old attachments, which might have withstood assaults in the country, giving way before these flattering influences; and, in the sanguine spirit which always governed her, she already looked upon her daughter as not only the possessor-in-fee of Denborough Park, with its manors and its untold wealth, but also of Wilton, with its old title.

To Jane herself the thoughts of the journey brought pleasure. It was an infinite relief to her to leave, for the present, scenes which had become connected with such painful passages in her life. Attractive as Denborough Park in itself was, her soul turned from it; for in vain she attempted to recall any pleasure which it had yielded or obtained equal to the quiet, unpretending home which had been left for it. Painful doubts and uncertainties had met her, as it were, at the very threshold; she had been made the tool of selfish cunning, the victim of senseless prejudices, the innocent means of the most exquisite and unmerited pain to two noble natures. What associations of tenderness or of comfort bound her

to this place? None! On the contrary, mortification, suffering, and humiliation were alone impressed on her memory; and any change, she felt, must be for the better.

We will leave all the preparation for the journey and set out with our travellers; the general and his kinswomen in the most commodious and elegant coach which those days could furnish, drawn by four horses; and another following, containing their servants, and such necessaries for the journey as the luxurious habits of the nabob required, and which he knew even the extraordinary accommodations of the best inns could not furnish. It was the first week in May; a full month later than the general commonly went to London, his present journey having been delayed in consequence of Jane's illness; and now also, contrary to his usual custom, the journey was made much slower, time being allowed to see everything interesting or beautiful by the way. Relays of horses were provided all along the road, but they stood harnessed in their stalls often many hours after the appointed time.

What contrasts presented themselves to the

mind of Jane as they approached Harbury! which, to the unspeakable delight of her mother, lay in their direct route, and was by no means to be avoided. She knew every turn of the road, every coppice, every brook, every tree;—nay, every breach in an old fence, every picturesque bit of old lichen-covered paling, was familiar to her. There winded the dingle, so renowned for its orchises, and which even now, she knew, was gemmed over, among its mossy hazel roots, with thousands of primroses: there was the croft already yellow over with cowslips, and a little way onward the one which was even more beautiful with its wild daffodils. There peeped the very hill, crowned with its young plantations, bright in the tender green foliage of spring, where, at that time, the ground was blue with myriads of nodding blue-bells. She seemed to hear the thrush sing, the stock-dove coo, and the multitude of small singing birds fill the air with "their sweet jargoning," as she had heard so many a time in many a former spring. But, above all, there it was that the last evening walk was taken with Brian Livingstone; and, who knew but the place had become sacred to him from that very

cause? Nay, how knew she but he had there pondered in bitterness of heart on her supposed fickleness, her worldliness, her neglect? Her spirit died within her at the thought. Everything about her looked the same as formerly; it might have been twelve months back, for any external change in nature; but what a change was there in her own feelings and in her own experience! Twelve months back, perhaps this very day, she might be wandering with her beloved friend by some brook-side, watching the first peeping of the water plants, or the manœuvring of some shy, timid denizen of the stream, with no deeper care than it—unapprehensive of sorrow or disappointment, and alive to every passing influence of pleasure even when presenting itself in no more uncommon guise than a burst of sunshine or a sweet sentiment of poetry.

While these thoughts, little calculated to exalt her present condition, were passing through her mind, feelings of a very different character were passing through that of her mother. Her sentiment was something like this: "Here am I, people of Harbury, my former neighbours and acquaintance, and you, the Parkinsons, especi-

ally, now drawing near your town in the full blaze of my glory! Come out and amaze your eyes by the spectacle! No delusion is this, no false dream of greatness—here I sit in the midst of my real splendour!"

Cæsar entering the Capitol with the subject world at his feet felt less personal pride than did Mrs. Ashenhurst as the postilions whirled round the corner of the street, and drew up at the Queen's Head in the admiring eyes of all the town of Harbury; Mrs. Ashenhurst being all the time conscious that the full sense of her greatness was more conveyed by the carriage that followed than even by themselves. What could her good looks, smiling countenance and rich dress, the elegant simplicity and refined beauty of her daughter, the sumptuous nonchalance of the general, tell them, the good easy people of Harbury, of all the wealth and glory with which she had become endowed and glorified, in comparison with what the travelling equipage of their very servants implied? Her senses were all alive; she heard the drawing up of the satellite-carriage, and felt to herself, "Now you see!"

It had been noised abroad in Harbury that

Mrs. and Miss Ashenhurst would pass through in the course of the day, therefore everybody was on the watch; and many were the towns-people who collected in the street and houses about the Queen's Head to get a sight of them; and no sooner had the carriage made a halt than the bells pealed forth a joyous welcome. The smiling faces of the jolly landlord and landlady greeted them with a happy return, and the hope that they would alight.

"No, they were proceeding immediately." Mrs. Ashenhurst felt that this was much more *comme-il-faut* for her grandeur. Here she sat as on her throne to be worshipped. The parish clerk came with his bow hoping they would "please to remember the ringers:" Mrs. Ashenhurst gave him money far beyond his hopes. The whole place seemed astir. The grocer, his apprentices and customers, were all at his door; the draper at his; the shoemaker and his sons in their leathern aprons joined themselves to a miscellaneous knot of people; the cooper and his fat wife, and many a neighbour stood in another admiring group—all with the familiar faces and figures of old townsfolk. Many were those

who, at a respectful distance, examined the first carriage, more were they who crowded about the second, wondering, admiring, and declaring they must be grand, they must be happy indeed, who could afford to have such fine servants and provide thus for their accommodation. A crowd of heads was at Miss Farnel's window; and the next moment, the tall meagre lady herself, in the well-known, best visiting carmelite-brown Paduasoy gown, and carefully-kept India scarf, was at the coach-door.

"My dear Mrs. Ashenhurst, I am so delighted to see you!" she began, in her thin, wiry voice. "How well you look! And Miss Jane, I protest I never saw her so blooming in my life. —Thank you, ma'am, I am better than I have been. I thought of leaving my house, but I shall not now. Oh! what an altered place this is! Everybody one cares for gone; and only think of poor Mrs. Burgoyne and all! Well, you 'll make a happy day in Harbury!—The Willoughbys— Oh yes,—thank you, they are tolerably; they would have liked to have seen you, but thought they were not intimate enough;

and, do you know, the Parkinsons are over the way !—' Don't tell her for the world !' said Mrs. Parkinson; 'but one likes to get a peep as well as one's neighbours;' and, I assure you, there has not been a party worth going to since you left," hurried on the overjoyed and much privileged Miss Farnel, glancing between every sentence at the general, and looking alternately from mother to daughter. The officious landlord, with a bow, informed them that "all was now ready."

"Well, God bless you, Miss Farnel !" said the gracious Mrs. Ashenhurst, giving her hand.

"And will you, dear Miss Farnel," said Jane, "divide this small sum among my old friends in the almshouses ?"

"With the greatest pleasure in the world," returned Miss Farnel, taking the two guineas Jane presented; "and I am so happy to have seen you ! That 's a mighty becoming hat of yours, Miss Jane. Good-b'ye, — and a good journey to you ! Your servant, General Dubois." And Miss Farnel, with a deep curtsey, withdrew a few paces backward.

The carriage-door was closed, the postilions in

motion, and the housed or window-blind-hidden people came forth or looked out; and, amid the ringing of the bells, and the applause of the handsomely-paid and bonused people of the Queen's Head, the first carriage rattled off and the second followed it.

Jane looked down the street where Mrs. Burgoyne had lived, and saw the board nailed to one of its large trees which announced that the house was yet to be let. Presently afterwards they passed their own old home: a thrill passed through her heart, and tears involuntarily came to her eyes. How small it looked! how familiar, and yet, at the same time, how unlike anything that now belonged to them! A servant-maid was drawing along the gravel-walk a spotted wooden horse to amuse two fat children; and a stout middle-aged person, with but slight pretensions to gentlemanship, delayed the shutting of the gate to watch the equipages drive past. Two minutes afterwards, they suddenly stopped; and, hurried and out of breath, Mrs. Thackaray the elder presented herself with a nosegay of spring-flowers in her hand.

"I beg your pardon, ladies," she said, "but

my master seed you come in, and I just ran down to Mrs. Burgoyne's garden,—we 've the care of the place till it 's let,—to get you two or three flowers; they are better nor our own; and Miss Jane used to be so partial to a posy!"

"Thank you, thank you," said Jane, taking the nosegay.

"Give her this piece of money," said Mrs. Ashenhurst, as the carriage drove on.

"No," said Jane; "the flowers were given from good-will, not for reward;" and she nodded an adieu to the poor woman.

"Well, Heaven bless her, and send her a good husband!" thought Mrs. Thackaray, just as the second carriage drove past and left her thinking; "and there 's one sits there as has a good place of it, if she had only half as much reason to thank her as my son's wife had."

Nothing further worth narrating occurred on the journey. Jane, invigorated in body, and with spirits sensibly refreshed and lightened by a journey so pleasantly taken, and at so congenial a season, entered the lordly mansion in Grosvenor-square with as much of her former buoyancy of heart as could exist with her late experience.

CHAPTER XVI.

The very next day the Cornburys' coroneted coach stood at the door. Mrs. Ashenhurst received her noble friend with open arms; and her ladyship, coming to tell news, had it literally extracted from her,—so great was her incapacity for talking, and so much easier was it to answer the comprehensive questions which Mrs. Ashenhurst from experience knew how to put, than to give a circumstantial relation of what she had to communicate. The sum and substance of all this was, the arrival of the Honourable Miss Jacquetta Freemantle, the dominant spirit of this collateral branch of the Cornbury family, together with her so-many-years-junior brother, the Honourable Conyers Freemantle, whom it now was her pleasure to reconcile to his noble relations after a ten years' dissension, and for whom she was desirous also of forming a matrimonial connexion;—the corollary of all this being, that Mrs. Ashenhurst and her daughter should be introduced to them the very next day, at Lord Cornbury's house in Berkeley-square, the two families alone being present, in order to bring the young

people acquainted before they mixed in general society. The two ladies understood each other's plans perfectly. Lady Cornbury, too indolent to plot or even devise a plot, was yet desirous of securing to the nephew she had always loved so beautiful a bride, and for the house of Conyers, whose well-being was dear to her as her life's blood, — herself being of it — own cousin to the heiress whom the Honourable Mr. Freemantle, her husband's brother, had married, —so noble an accession of wealth as the heiress of General Dubois must bring to it. Mrs. Ashenhurst, on her part, with but little delicacy of feeling, and unbounded ambition, bent only on aggrandisement, determined to plot and counterplot, so that she could but bring about a match so entirely to her heart's content as this.

In order to sound the general's thoughts on the subject, she mentioned the call from Lady Cornbury, and the proposed next day's visit; adding, "I can give a shrewd guess as to what is in her ladyship's mind all the time: she wishes to secure your niece for her nephew, knowing as well as any of us, though she says so little, that the first chance is worth having."

The general answered her with one of those sinister looks which she so extremely disliked—they made her uneasy; but his verbal reply was satisfactory. "He would not desire his niece to engage the attentions of a better man than the Honourable Conyers Freemantle—she would have his entire acquiescence in so doing."

All this plotting and assenting, however, was most sedulously kept from the knowledge of the party most interested in it: Mrs. Ashenhurst would not, for the world, that her daughter should have the remotest notion of it; nor was Jane aware of the arrival of the Freemantles, and the consequent reconcilement, till within an hour of making the visit,—then nothing more was needed to give interest to a visit otherwise of a most commonplace character. Jane knew the only event perhaps capable of arousing the lethargic spirit of Lady Cornbury was this reconciliation: the only being for whom she had at any time evinced any affection—of whom she appeared to have retained any memory, was this young man,—"poor, dear Conyers," as she invariably called him; although his lordship many a time so far exerted himself as to remind her "that Mr. Freemantle had given them serious cause of displeasure."

Whatever his misconduct had been did not concern Jane; she thought much less of him than of the pleasure his return must have afforded to his aunt; and accordingly, at her mother's instance, she put on the blue and silver brocade and the suit of Furnapore diamonds, in honour of the reconciliation, not of the guest, as was the design of Mrs. Ashenhurst.

The general congratulated Jane on her appearance; and her mother saw her seated opposite them, as they drove to Berkeley-square, in the firm persuasion that she was the one-day-to-be Lady Cornbury of Wilton and Court-Conyers.

Whatever Lady Cornbury's pleasure might be in the reconciliation, to Jane's astonishment it made but very little visible alteration in her countenance and manners. His lordship, on the contrary, was astonishingly animated and alert; he really seemed as if his heart beat the quicker for it: on him devolved the honour of introducing the parties to each other. Jane had not been prepared for the full ceremonial—the meeting with the honourable Miss Jacquetta Freemantle.—Jacquetta! she knew the histories connected with that name at Wilton; she knew the fair, meek face of the one Jacquetta who stabbed her lord, as the story told,

with "a bodkin;" and the other, the haughty woman of imperial beauty, with eyes full of dreamy, fearful passion, whose crimes people spoke of in whispers, in dread lest the uneasy spirit which had troubled the scene of her guilt so long should again be given up from its awful place: and now certainly here was a third Jacquetta, not unworthy of these ancestors!—a tall, haughty woman, of commanding figure and presence, approaching middle age, but evidently using no means to counteract the effects of time; as one regardless of man's opinion, or of woman's either; as one who would say, "What are these things, what is all the world, to the Honourable Jacquetta Freemantle? and am not I she?" Jane remembered the old housekeeper's story, that the Lady Jacquetta was not dead; that for certain she had been seen in flesh and blood many a long year after people thought she had mouldered in her grave! and that, for her part, she believed the coffin would be a strong one, and the grave a deep one, that must hold her down! All this, which she had listened to, and shuddered at the while, now came back to her mind with a fearful reality and a repelling influence as she saw the proud

woman turn from her mother's greeting with ill-disguised contempt, and then stand with her haughty head thrown back, one arm dropped, and the other held close to her waist, as if to still the knocking of her proud heart,—the very attitude of the awful Jacquetta!

As Jane was presented, she rapidly eyed her from head to foot, and then gave her hand with that air of condescending greatness which the powerful assume to inveigle as much as to honour. Jane felt a repugnance amounting almost to horror, when the lady retained her hand, and, begging his lordship's permission, conducted her half-way down the room. "I must introduce you to each other," said she mysteriously, and the moment afterwards presented her to her brother, desiring him to improve the acquaintance. The gentleman to whom she was introduced was, in most respects, outwardly unlike his sister. He was singularly fair for a man, with flaxen hair, and those colourless eyebrows and eyelashes which give so unmanly a character to the countenance, and the general expression of his face, though cold, was by no means unpleasing. In person he was above the middle size and of a good

figure, but his manners were at times almost awkward and shy, while at others he assumed an air of indifference and haughtiness. A short time, but certainly not this one interview alone, convinced Jane of what was in truth the history of this young man's education. Many years the junior of his strong-minded but imperious sister, to whom the management of the inheritor as well as the inheritance had been intrusted, he was compelled to assume a character in some respects opposed to his own. The better parts of his nature were cheerfulness, a certain degree of amiability, and extremely affable manners. He had been trained to be reserved and haughty; but there was a *gaucherie* about him which betrayed the mask, and hence his manners appeared variable and unformed. The only part of his natural character which had been zealously fostered, was what he inherited in common with the whole line, inordinate family pride. His feeling was less that he belonged to the universal human family, than to the noblest branch of it,—that he was a Freemantle engrafted on the old, true Conyers stock. Besides this, was another ramification of the same passion—extreme personal selfishness;—that mean selfishness which

makes the boy snatch the apple from the lips of his younger brother when he has eaten his own, and makes the man regardless of the feelings and convenience of others when his own pleasure, caprice, or indulgence comes in the way. He was a character and person in the first instance to be seen with indifference; in the second, to interest to a certain degree, because it was discovered that he had some native good properties; but in the end to be despised, inasmuch as petty meannesses outweigh common-place virtues. So far came to the knowledge of Jane—a little more must be added for the sake of our readers.

As a boy, and as a youth even, Conyers Freemantle had been submissive and obedient to his sister, in virtue of that natural authority which strong minds acquire over weaker ones; but as he advanced to manhood his spirit began to crave after greater freedom of will; there were certain buddings of rebellion in his mind, and though as yet it had rarely evinced itself in acts, it invariably strove against every command of his sister. Hence at this very time, when he knew his sister's designs to be matrimonial, he vowed with himself not to further them even by the lifting of a finger.

The result of this visit appeared sufficiently satisfactory to bring the parties together again in a short time. Little did Jane suspect of private meetings of which she was the subject, when the imperious Jacquetta treated for her hand on behalf of her brother, much in the same style as the ambassador of a sovereign prince might demand in marriage the daughter of an inferior line with whom policy as much as inclination made it advantageous to unite himself. The matter was satisfactorily adjusted. The Honourable Conyers Freemantle was to take to wife Jane Ashenhurst, the fair heiress of the great nabob of Furnapore. So stated the fashionable newspapers, under the head "Marriage in High Life," — only giving dashes and asterisks for proper names. But Jane read no newspapers, nor busied herself with the passing tattle of the day; and she was perhaps the only person in their whole circle who knew nothing of what was agitating.

Mrs. Ashenhurst supposed, as was natural, that the lover had gained the good-will of his mistress —felicitating herself the while on the extraordinary success of the scheme; and was perfectly charmed with the acquiescence of her daughter, though, from unpleasant recollections, she ab-

stained from speaking on the subject to her at present.

All this time Mr. Freemantle considered Jane a party in the design upon him; and though at first, as we have said, averse to the scheme from opposition to his sister, his self-love had already accepted the flattery of Jane's supposed willingness, and he was becoming less and less averse. The attentions, however, which he paid her—a large award from him who had hitherto thought no woman worthy of his slightest regard—were still so little beyond common courtesies that they did not even excite her suspicion, leaving her entirely at liberty to think her own thoughts and pursue her own fancies at will; his self-love, the while, giving all she said and did a reference to himself. This state of cross-purposes must, however, have worked itself straight, had they remained much longer together; but at the end of the third day Mr. Freemantle returned to his country residence without even a formal leave-taking of Jane, from a temporary pique against his sister.

A week of stately amities succeeded, and then a party was proposed to Court-Conyers—a visit of the bride-elect and her friends to her future home. Little could Jane imagine why the un-

gracious Jacquetta condescended to spend a whole morning in formally speaking of the family history—of its illustrious descent and alliances—of the Conyers, who were even more illustrious than the Freemantles—of the family quarterings—of the family plate and jewels;—"reserving the subject of the rent-roll for her brother; though she understood it as well—nay, certainly better than himself; and it would be found that all future branches of the family were infinitely indebted to her for the zealous management she had so long given to its most minute concerns. But," added she with dignity, "had I laid down my life, it would not have been too much for so illustrious a name!—though certainly *you* cannot be supposed to understand the responsibility of such an inheritance!"

Haughtily as all this information was given, contemptuous as had been its winding up, and little concern as Jane felt herself to have in it, she had too much general kindness, was too much disposed to give and receive pleasure, to appear indifferent to any gratuitous instance of good-will, even from a person so repugnant to her as the Honourable Jacquetta Freemantle.

CHAPTER XVII.

The important day came. The distance to Court-Conyers was thirty miles: the party was to lunch there, see the house, and return to London in the evening; which would easily be accomplished, as they were to travel post.

Lord and Lady Cornbury and Miss Ashenhurst occupied one carriage; the general, Mrs. Ashenhurst, and Miss Freemantle, the other. There could be no interest to Jane in the meagre conversation of her companions, she therefore occupied herself with her own thoughts; and some little curiosity she felt respecting the mansion they were about to visit, which to her imagination seemed to have something ogre-like about it. How the other triad occupied themselves is not known, further than that they appeared singularly gracious to each other and to everybody else on their arrival at Court-Conyers.

Jane's imagination had not pictured a more sombre and forbidding exterior than the place presented. It seemed of large extent, square, heavy, and prison-like, built of stone which was

black with age, with low round towers, small windows, and heavy-browed doors. It stood low, in an unpicturesque and unpleasing park; woods of pine thickly interspersed with ilex and yew flanking it on either hand, and stretching behind upward to the brow of the only eminence for miles round.

"This place never looks cheerful," said Lord Cornbury, "come when you will."

"It never does," was his lady's reply.

"But we should not say so to you, my dear Miss Ashenhurst!"

"To me!—oh, sir, you are perfectly welcome to say what you please of this old castle for me!" said Jane, wondering in perfect simplicity what they meant: "for my part, I think it a hideous place!"

The laconic people made no remark, and the carriage waited its turn to draw up to the den-like door.

If the Honourable Conyers Freemantle had been indifferent and silent in Berkeley-square, he seemed bent to make up for all deficiencies in his own house. Nothing could exceed the elaborate ceremonial of their reception. One thing

soon struck Jane's attention most unpleasantly: that she was made, instead, as she supposed herself, the least important person of the party, the one for whom everything seemed arranged; for whom, in fact, everybody seemed to have come there.

When the party had refreshed themselves, the host requested the honour of her hand, and led the way in the domiciliary inspection, desiring her free opinion of all she saw, and begging she would suggest alterations according to her own taste, at the same time insinuating that everything had been arranged by a Conyers or a Freemantle, and therefore of necessity had remained *in statu quo.* Every moment Jane's annoyance and suspicion grew; she longed to join herself to the others, but they seemed to keep aloof, and she feared at the same time to make herself conspicuous or ridiculous. By degrees the whole tribulation of the intrigue came upon her, and she walked on from room to room silent and irresolute, which the lover mistook for passive obedience or timid admiration.

At length Jane found that, either intentionally or accidentally, they had missed their party; and she now stood with him alone in a small room,

apparently in one of the towers, and to which they had ascended by a narrow stone stair. They entered the room: its aspect was forbidding, small, and gloomy, containing only tarnished folio volumes arranged on shelves dusty and worm-eaten, two high leather-covered chairs, a desk, and a table. Jane started, for it seemed like the den of the ogre himself. She attempted to retreat; but the door was shut, and her companion already had seized her hand.

"Charming Miss Ashenhurst!" said he, "why will you persist in this cruel silence? I confess to you that I was once indifferent to this match; but I am not so now. Jacquetta has lorded it so long, she thinks me still a child, and to be awed by the lifting of her finger; but she will find I have the spirit of a Freemantle in me!"

"Let me go!" said Jane, withdrawing her hand, and really terrified.

"We will not trouble our heads about this old place," pleaded Mr. Freemantle, looking at her the while with unfeigned admiration. "*You* will have time enough to study it hereafter; and *I* must make up for lost time."

Whether he would have protested his passion

on his knees, or by any other approved mode of lover-craft, cannot be known; for Jane, though feeling as it were betrayed, and in a place which her imagination made fearful, and with her heart as cold as death, put him back with a dignity he could not withstand.

"Some strange delusion has been practised on you, sir," she said; "for, till within this hour, I had no idea what this visit meant."

"Come, Miss Ashenhurst, I know this is the way with you ladies; but the faster you fly, the faster I shall pursue: and I think I have you pretty safely now," said he, in a tone between good-humour and triumph.

"I am sincere, Mr. Freemantle," said Jane coldly and calmly,—"I am most truly sincere, when I assure you of my entire ignorance of this scheme till within the last half-hour."

He looked at her for a moment as if he disbelieved his senses, and then burst into a loud laugh. "Come, come, Miss Ashenhurst, this is truly ridiculous; you think it your turn to be cold now. I beg your pardon for my past indifference; punish it any way but by your coldness: but, to speak the truth, I was provoked with Jacquetta."

"I wish you were provoked with her now," said Jane, half amused spite of herself, "if it would insure me your *present* indifference."

"Miss Ashenhurst," he returned, looking impatient; "there has been too much of this,—I am tired of this child's play."

"Sir," said Jane, "your words are enigmas; but I do not care about their meaning. I must now return to my friends."

"No!" answered he almost fiercely; "I shall not part with you thus; you were in a different humour in Berkeley-square!"

"Because, sir," said Jane, offended and angry, "I never thought about *you* in Berkeley-square."

"Upon my honour!" exclaimed he in a tone and with a gesture which made Jane involuntarily look at the thickness of the walls. "And this scheme was concocted at Wilton among yourselves! Do you know, madam, to whom you are speaking?"

"To Mr. Conyers Freemantle," she replied, with an indifference that she did not feel.

"Madam!—Miss Ashenhurst," he began, in a tone that still more terrified her; and, in very despair, she laid her hand upon the iron pin of

the door. To her inexpressible relief, it gave way, and the exploring party was in the act of ascending the stairs.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Jane," said Lord Cornbury, who was foremost, and too unapprehensive to observe the disordered countenance of either herself or Mr. Freemantle. "We have certainly arrived inopportunely."

"No, no," said the master of the mansion; "and you must see this chamber; it is of some renown in the house, being the one in which our ancestor, the astrologer, punished his contumacious wife."

"Ay, he poisoned her!" said Lord Cornbury, as the whole party entered.

Jane, sick at heart, and filled with perfect loathing of the place and the people, walked hastily down the stairs to an open casement-window that she might look out upon the sunshine; but the wood of dark pine and yew lay all below, stretching upward to the very horizon. It was a dreary prospect; it seemed as if cheerful sunlight never came there; and an impatience to be gone seized upon Jane's spirit like anger.

"It is an evil place," thought she; "it fills me with revenge and cruelty!"

The party descended; Mr. Freemantle and his sister bringing up the rear.

"We have now seen all!" said Lord Cornbury.

"All except the chapel!" said Miss Jacquetta.

"We will not go there;" yawned Lady Cornbury, seating herself on a sofa in the chamber through which they were passing.

"We will wait for you here," assented Lord Cornbury, seating himself by his lady.

"Come, Miss Ashenhurst," said Miss Jacquetta, griping her with her hard hand.

Jane, as if under the spell of a destiny, obeyed; and the next moment was conducted through a low arched door, to which they descended by a flight of chilly stone steps into the chancel of a church. She looked behind her for her friends; but the door was shut, and she stood alone with this fearful woman, who for two moments gazed into her face with a steady, severe countenance, as if she would penetrate her very soul. Jane's imagination, excited as it was,

was filled with terrible and undefined apprehensions; but she stood the scrutiny with an unblenching calmness.

The place was cold and silent as death, striking its sunless chill to the bone, while its influence fell solemnly on the spirit. Lofty and effigied tombs stood round; mural tablets of all ages were on the walls, and the floor was paved with graven stones and dark brazen plates of memorial. Two old, decaying banners, black and heavy with age, which had been borne by the Conyers' in the wars of the Roses and the Plantagenets, depended from the roof over the pews of black carved oak, lined with ancient crimson velvet, where the proud Conyers' had sat to worship for ages. A sombre light fell through the richly-painted panes of the large window that faced them, leaving the altar in perfect gloom, as if sunshine could not enter there.

At another time, or with less agitated feelings, Jane would have enjoyed this old place with a thorough zest; its antiquity, its solemnity, its gloom, would have produced a frame of mind in perfect accordance with it: but there was a

disquiet in her spirit now that unfitted her for any enjoyment; the muttered words, too, of her companion filled her with a mysterious awe: "By the souls of our ancestors!" she spoke, as if thinking aloud, "if it were—" and then she clenched a key in her strong, bony hand, as if she would make the senseless iron feel.

Jane started, believing this had reference to what had passed between herself and Mr. Freemantle.

"But come," said Miss Jacquetta, "I brought you to see the burial-place of the noble Conyers', and the one Freemantle, its last lord!"

And so saying, with the key she held in her hand, she opened a low door in the wall, and descending a few steps into perfect darkness, bade Jane follow her.

Jane hesitated to obey.

"You foolish child!" said Miss Jacquetta, speaking with a stern voice that seemed sepulchral; "why need you fear to enter this place, where so many of your betters are laid! Come down, and see where the direct line of the noble Conyers', and those as noble, with whom they

mated, lie piled, coffin on coffin, for twelve generations."

Jane considered how improbable it was that any evil was intended towards her, and descended the steps.

"Not one foot nearer!" cried Miss Jacquetta, speaking from among the coffins, as Jane had reached the middle of the vault,—"Not one step nearer! farther *you* never can enter!—here lie only the nobly born! fathers and sons for twelve generations, with their wives, none below a baron's daughter! You may go back!"

Jane felt displeased at this senseless parade of greatness. "And where," said she, as the lady emerged from the tombs,—"where lies the wife whom we heard above was murdered?"

"Nonsense!" retorted the descendant of the Conyers'; "do you believe whatever tradition hands down?"

"I heard it from a Conyers!" was Jane's answer.

Miss Jacquetta eyed her for a moment, and then said, bitterly: "That wife was the daughter of a commoner: and here she lies!" pointing

to a raised tomb, one of seven which stood side by side, with its well-wrought marble effigy,—"she lies here! These others also are wives of Conyers'; and one of them a daughter, who married unwisely and came here to die!"

"And here I must lie," thought Jane, "if I marry a Conyers,—which Heaven forbid! Nay, I will die first!" mused she, as she walked down the aisle and saw the arms of the proud Conyers' emblazoned above the Decalogue and the Lord's Prayer.

"You see the nobility of this house!" said Miss Jacquetta, reconducting Jane into the chancel; "you see who those were that mated with them! It is not for *you*, young woman, to undervalue a Conyers! Remember what you have seen!"

Jane felt utterly incapable of replying; and Miss Jacquetta, neither seeming to expect nor desire an answer, motioned her to follow through the door by which they had entered, haughtily keeping the advance; and presently afterwards they rejoined the party, who waited for them in the chamber.

Refreshments were again offered; which all

partook except Jane, who, though faint and weary, firmly refused; "I will neither break bread nor drink water in this house!" was her internal vow; and presently afterwards the carriages being announced, the party left Court-Conyers in the order they had arrived, the master not offering more than the most distant civilities to Jane, and remaining behind.

Jane began only to breathe freely when they left the demesne of the Conyers' and entered on the king's high-road. She turned to her companions to relieve herself by talking even on the most trivial passing subjects; but they were both fast asleep, nor did either of them wake till the carriage drew up at their own door at eleven o'clock at night.

When Jane took the place lately occupied by Miss Freemantle, in their drive to Grosvenor-square, she was immediately aware that some unpleasant rencontre had taken place. She could see by the indistinct light of the carriage-lamps, the haughty, angry countenance of her uncle, and the perturbed anxiety of her mother's: no word was exchanged, but the very silence seemed full of terrible omen.

Jane ran hastily to her own chamber, and thence sent to request an interview with her mother; but she was informed that Mrs. Ashenhurst also was gone to her chamber and desired not to be disturbed that evening.

What had occurred during the homeward drive Jane could in part conjecture; but her mother's refusal to see her filled her with an exquisite distress, even more painful than the other events of the day. The day itself was frightful in review; and Jane sat down in the state of one who, waking from a terrible dream, finds the realities that encompass him even more distressing.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHAT had occurred during the journey must now be briefly related.

Miss Jacquetta, quick-sighted as she always was, observed the apparent want of understanding between the lovers, and had extracted sufficient information from her brother to decide her line of conduct. Scarcely, therefore, were they seated in the carriage, when, with all the offended pride

of a Conyers, she haughtily informed the general and Mrs. Ashenhurst of what she had discovered; adding, that "if Miss Ashenhurst was unaware of the great honour done her by these proposals, it behoved her relations to keep her from again offending. That, for her part, she did not now desire the connexion; still, as it was the wish of Mr. Conyers Freemantle that the affair should proceed, she was willing to sacrifice her own feelings; only she begged them to understand that a Conyers could not again be thus trifled with!"

Mrs. Ashenhurst internally resented this insolent harangue, but she waited to know the general's sentiments before she spoke. Great was her amazement then to find that, instead of retorting upon the arrogant lady and defending his niece, as she had hoped he would do, he joined entirely with her; reprobated Jane's conduct as childish and unpardonable, as what Mr. Conyers Freemantle could not in honour subject himself to a second time, and gave his word that no farther impediment on the part of his niece should prevent a marriage so entirely accordant with his wishes for her.

Spite of these concessions, good-humour was by no means restored. The general folded his arms as if in repressed anger against his niece; and the haughty Jacquetta sat like an angry porcupine, bristled at all points in her unmitigated wrath for the affront done to a Conyers by the daughter of a commoner.

Poor Mrs. Ashenhurst was like a troubled sea on which the storm comes from all points; she struggled with offended pride, with some maternal sympathy for her daughter, and with the consciousness that by neither General Dubois nor Miss Freemantle was she considered a party in the disposal of that daughter. Again self-interest and ambition bade her bear all patiently and submit; told her that come what would the general must not be offended—that policy as well as duty demanded acquiescence; and that, after all, the match was excellent—spite of the arrogant Miss Jacquetta, most excellent! What would the Cornburys say if it were given up, especially when things had gone so far!—and perhaps Jane had given Mr. Freemantle sufficient cause of offence. "She is so headstrong!" cogitated the poor lady; and then she remembered Brian Living-

stone, and how pertinacious her daughter had been. The more she thought, the more she fretted; and as she fretted she grew angry, and long before they reached London she had come to the conclusion so often come to before, that Jane was flying in the face of her duty, and ruining her good fortune!

Now for the first time in her life Mrs. Ashenhurst felt estranged from her daughter; and when she woke in the morning from a night of uneasy repose, she determined not to see her till she had encountered her friends in Berkeley-square. When Jane, therefore, inquired for her after a night far less refreshing than even her mother's, she was informed that Mrs. Ashenhurst was about leaving the house. Jane felt instantly the displeasure this implied, and without regarding the etiquette her mother had lately established, rushed into her dressing-room. Mrs. Ashenhurst had that moment dismissed her woman; and Jane, seeing her alone, threw her arms about her neck and sobbed on her bosom.

"Oh, mother!" said she at length, "why will you break my heart with this coldness! What have I done to make you, like everybody else, my enemy?"

"Dear love," said her mother, touched by her daughter's sincere grief, "how can you talk so! How can you think of calling me, or any one, your enemy?"

"Does not every one scheme to drive me mad?" cried Jane, with bitter agony. "Oh, mother, mother!—and could you countenance this hateful connexion! And did you know why I was taken to that horrid place!"

"My love, my dear love!" said Mrs. Ashenhurst, wishing the while she did not feel so deeply sorry for her daughter; "everybody knew why we went. Surely you cannot pretend ignorance!"

"Oh, mother!" cried Jane, reproachfully, "then you were a party in this miserable intrigue! You surely cannot wish me to marry that proud half-witted man; you surely cannot wish to put me in the power of that haughty, cruel woman!"

"Jane—Jane!" remonstrated her mother, "your imagination runs away with your reason! You really distract me—do be calm, child!"

"I cannot! I feel frantic when I think of it!"

"Oh, then I must leave you till you are

calm," said Mrs. Ashenhurst, moving towards the door.

"No, mother, do not leave me thus," said Jane, rising and repressing her emotion. "Oh, you do not know how miserable I am!"

"Well, love, what can I do for you?—you really are so violent!"

"I am calm—I will be calm—but tell me your mind about this wretched affair!" said the poor girl in a heart-broken tone.

"Why, my dear, what can I tell you that you do not know?" replied her mother, wishing sincerely she had never promoted the scheme.

"I know nothing!" said Jane.

"Do you not know that this match has been brought about by our friends the Cornburys?"

"No!"

"Why, my love, Mr. Freemantle himself must have declared his passion before he left Berkeley-square."

"Dearest mother, he never did!" was Jane's earnest reply.

"Really, love, you astonish me! But let me go, love; this is a queer business, and I must know the bottom of it."

"But, mother dear," said Jane, "before you go, let me beseech of you to be my friend. Oh, do, do!" cried she, kissing her mother's hand tenderly, while the tears streamed down her cheeks, "be my friend, dearest mother, and oppose this miserable connexion!—you have a right to do it, when you know how wretched it makes me!"

"Let me go, let me go, love," said Mrs. Ashenhurst, truly pitying her daughter, and yet knowing how deeply committed she herself was in this affair.

"Listen to me, dearest, dearest mother, and be my friend;—whom can I appeal to but you? Tell my uncle that I cannot marry. It is not Mr. Freemantle that I reject—but I cannot marry; you know, dear mother, I cannot!"

Jane had overstepped the range of her mother's sympathies, and had touched on an offensive topic; her reply was accordingly—"I know no such thing, Jane! but this I know, that it is your duty to obey your uncle!"

"I could lie down and die," said Jane in a voice of the deepest anguish, "to hear you talk thus, dear mother!—it is so unlike what we used to be!"

"It is no use talking," replied Mrs. Ashenhurst; "you know your uncle as well as I do! What can *I* do! It is ridiculous of you to talk so. What can *you* do either!"

"I will never marry Mr. Freemantle!" said Jane firmly; "that is what I can do!—I will go back to Harbury and earn my own bread first!"

"Really, Jane, how you surprise me! Well, you must take you own course—only I am sorry you are in such a temper." And Mrs. Ashenhurst, wonderfully relieved by the turn the conversation had taken, hastily left her dressing-room, stepped into her carriage, and was driven to Berkeley-square.

The proverb of "the frying-pan and the fire" might not inaptly be applied to the case of poor Mrs. Ashenhurst, were it not so inelegant. But it is too late to seek for another comparison now, as she is at this moment entering the breakfast-room in Berkeley-square.

There sat the still bristled Jacquetta, and there sat the sleek Lady Cornbury, looking ruffled and ill at ease, her Conyers blood mounting to her quiet forehead from the enormous affront put upon the house the day before: and Lord

Cornbury himself was walking up and down the room with a letter in his hand, which had come express from Mr. Conyers Freemantle that very morning; in which letter it was stated, "that notwithstanding the young lady's mistake in thinking a Conyers could be played with like a child's shuttlecock, he was more bent on the match now than ever, and should accordingly be in Berkeley-square that evening, in order to prosecute his suit, and accomplish the marriage at as early a date as possible."

The point at issue when Mrs. Ashenhurst entered was, whether, considering the extent of the young lady's delinquency, it became his dignity to do so; nay, whether he would not compromise his honour by doing so.

Miss Freemantle had found an unlooked-for ally in Lady Cornbury, and their opinion was, "that the indiscretion of Miss Ashenhurst forfeited the honour of so illustrious a connexion; that the thing did not admit of debate,—a Conyers could not ally himself with such contumacy."

Lord Cornbury, on the contrary, was approving warmly of Mr. Freemantle's spirit, and declaring that Miss Ashenhurst was too charming in herself, and too important a match in point of

fortune, to be thrown away for an idle pique of honour,—for, after all, perhaps nothing but an idle lover's quarrel.

The entrance of Mrs. Ashenhurst suspended the subject. The ladies received her most coldly; she not only wished herself back in Grosvenor-square, but the whole calamity of losing her noble friends' countenance came upon her, and she felt how impossible it would have been to retract, had she come there for that purpose. Without vouchsafing any notice whatever of her greeting, Miss Freemantle haughtily left the room, intending it as a signal punishment and token of displeasure; but her retreat brought assurance to the enemy. Mrs. Ashenhurst changed her tactics instantly; and now, instead of conciliation, as she had meditated, resolved on attack, confident in her accustomed influence over the indolent minds of her friends.

"It was so strange a thing," she said, "that Mr. Conyers Freemantle, who had such abundant opportunities of declaring his wishes, had not done so! She considered her daughter extremely ill-used, and certainly thought some explanation or apology was requisite from him."

Lady Cornbury opened her eyes, and absolutely stared at Mrs. Ashenhurst.

"To be sure! a most extraordinary lover," replied his lordship, "if the case really be so!"

"It is so," said Mrs. Ashenhurst warmly; "and now, forsooth, you are all offended because Jane is surprised at the familiarity of a person who has never declared himself! I am sure I would never have gone to Court-Conyers, nor should my daughter, if I had known how matters stood!" added she with a warmth and dignity that had its full effect on her hearers.

"My dear madam," said his lordship in his most conciliatory voice, "you have just cause of complaint. But," continued he, assuming a jocose air, "I see how it is, — Mr. Conyers Freemantle was not to be driven into love by Miss Jacquetta; he is now in love of his own head, — things will go on smoothly now, never fear. Read this letter, my dear madam,—I think it will satisfy you: or, rather, I will read it, without troubling you," said he, remembering some expressions which might perhaps give umbrage to the lady; and accordingly he read the letter in his own way. "This must satisfy you, I think!" said he when he had done.

"Certainly, my lord; he could not speak more handsomely," replied she.

"And you are satisfied too, my dear?" said Lord Cornbury, turning to his lady, who was calming down into her ordinary quiet.

"So that Conyers is not to be refused and played with like a common person, I am satisfied," was her answer; and as this was a morning of extraordinary exertion, she added the moment afterwards, "Miss Ashenhurst was always a favourite of mine, or I should not have wished Conyers to marry her."

Mrs. Ashenhurst, with unfeigned pleasure, expressed herself highly complimented.

"Then," said her ladyship, "we are friends again,—I hate the trouble of being angry."

"Oh," returned Lord Cornbury, in perfect good-humour, "we know you are a Conyers, and are privileged to resent a family affront—even when a Conyers is wrong," said he, bowing to Mrs. Ashenhurst.

"I am sure I do not know what Miss Freemantle will say," remarked her ladyship.

"Miss Freemantle is never so happy as when she is angry, therefore she will have reason to thank us," said his lordship, laughing.

The visit ended to the entire satisfaction of all parties; there never had been more amity between them even at Wilton, and Mrs. Ashenhurst left the house assured that, some way or other, things would work themselves straight. "But," thought she, as she was driven along, "I will be perfectly passive: Mr. Freemantle shall plead his own suit, and to the general shall devolve the office of compelling Jane to obedience, —I never do any good when I interfere!"

A succession of visiters and engagements occupied her through the rest of the morning, much to her satisfaction, for she determined not to encounter a second interview with her daughter.

The general returned to dinner in extraordinary spirits. He too had been in Berkeley-square, where everything had likewise fallen out to his satisfaction. As a piece of pleasant news, he informed his sister and niece, that he had encountered no less a person than Sir Harbottle Grimstone in Pall Mall: and the nabob was extremely merry at the thought of the diversion he should have with this renowned knight among his London friends. Besides this, he brought with him a letter from Lord Montjoy, wherein

his lordship spoke in the most flattering terms of having made the acquaintance of his excellent cousin Mrs. Ashenhurst, at her own pretty house at Harbury, and that he had not forgotten the extraordinary beauty of her little daughter. Moreover, his lordship promised himself the pleasure of a week's shooting at Denborough Park in the autumn."

Nothing could have been more gratifying to Mrs. Ashenhurst than this letter. She laughed with her brother at the unfortunate baronet, applauded his proposed practical jokes, and once in every half-hour, at least, told what a perfect gentleman was their noble cousin Montjoy.

The evening was spent at the opera; Jane wearing the blue and silver brocade and the Furnapore diamonds, to please her uncle; and Mrs. Ashenhurst having the pleasure of seeing that her daughter attracted universal admiration, —nobody thinking the while that a heavy and anxious heart beat under those splendid habiliments.

The next day Mr. Conyers Freemantle presented himself in Grosvenor-square; but the ladies were not at home. He had, however,

a prolonged interview with General Dubois, the result of which was entirely satisfactory to both parties. The lover spoke of his unbounded passion, and earnest desire for an immediate marriage, — blamed Jacquetta for everything that had hitherto gone wrong, and hinted of marriage settlements. Whatever the nabob's promises or insinuations were, even the Conyers was satisfied, and internally called himself "a lucky fellow." After several hours thus spent in business, the gentlemen agreed to pass the remainder of the day together, and to close the evening at Vauxhall.

CHAPTER XIX.

The next morning, while Mrs. Ashenhurst and her daughter were yet in their beds, the whole house was thrown into the greatest possible state of confusion by the stopping of a hackney-coach, out of which was supported, by Mr. Conyers Freemantle and a surgeon, the general himself, faint and bleeding. He was conveyed to his chamber, and the news carried to his kinswomen. Mrs.

Ashenhurst was waked from a dream of wedding favours and coronets to hear the shocking tidings, which threw her into violent hysterics. Jane, full of the most incoherent apprehensions, hastily dressed herself and ran to the breakfast-room, where she despatched a servant to request admission for her if she could be of any service to her uncle, or to bring her back particulars of this strange event.

Mr. Conyers Freemantle attended the servant back. Every subject but this one seemed to shrink into minor importance, yet still she felt a momentary repugnance to encounter this man. Fortunately, however, just then her mother entered, folded in wrapping-gown and shawl, leaning on the arm of her woman, and looking well nigh as feeble as the general himself. Mrs. Ashenhurst was seated with great care and state in a large easy-chair; and then, with some little embarrassment both of manner and countenance, Mr. Conyers Freemantle informed them that he and the general had spent the last evening at Vauxhall; that there they had met a gentleman between whom and the general an old quarrel seemed to exist.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Jane, clasping her hands and comprehending at once the whole affair.

"Sir Harbottle Grimstone?" asked Mrs. Ashenhurst.

"The same," replied Mr. Conyers Freemantle. "A renewal of the quarrel took place, and a challenge from Sir Harbottle was the result. I had the honour to attend General Dubois as his second this morning; and I must acknowledge that his antagonist took no unfair advantage, though the consequence has been so unlucky."

"Is he dangerously wounded?" asked Jane.

Mr. Conyers Freemantle bowed to Jane with the greatest deference, and informed her, that a skilful surgeon was with him, but, as yet, had not given his opinion.

Mrs. Ashenhurst again fell into hysterics, and was conveyed to her chamber by her maid and daughter.

Many hours of the most dreadful suspense succeeded; the general resisting every solicitation, not only of the surgeon, but of his friends Mr. Conyers Freemantle and Lord Cornbury, who were now with him, to let his wound be examined. At

the same time that he deplored this accident, he imprecated curses and vengeance on the head of Sir Harbottle, and insisted with fierce earnestness that he would not die. The surgeon at length declared that the general would be guilty of a species of suicide if he longer delayed the examination, and that, in fact, he himself would leave the house unless he was allowed to use his own means for his restoration. The general submitted; Mr. Conyers Freemantle and Lord Cornbury withdrew; the valet remained in the ante-room, and the surgeon was left alone with the patient. With what intense anxiety did Jane await the issue! "There is a mystery then about him," thought Mrs. Ashenhurst, in the midst of her agitation; "I wonder what it can be!"

At the end of the examination, they were informed that the surgeon dared not give hopes, but that he earnestly requested to call in additional surgical aid, which the general violently opposed; that now Mr. Mortlake, his lawyer, was sent for instantly at his own request, with whom he was to remain undisturbed for two hours.

At length the surgeon joined them in the drawing-room.

"Dear madam," said he with a distressed and anxious countenance, to Mrs. Ashenhurst, the moment he entered, "for God's sake, madam, if you have any influence, induce him to let me have assistance! The extraction of the ball might save his life, but I dare not perform it alone!"

"Why does he object?" asked she, her curiosity overpowering her anxiety.

"That, madam, is not the question!" said the agitated man; and then he turned to Jane.

"I will introduce *you* to the chamber if you will plead for me!" said he, in a voice of such distress as might have pleaded for his own life. "Cannot you influence him?"

"Oh, sir, I doubt it, I doubt it!" exclaimed Jane, clasping her hands; "but I will try!—or cannot I do something for you?—I think I could hand you your instruments?"

"No, no," said he; "I want the experienced manual aid of a brother-surgeon! He cannot live four-and-twenty hours without surgical aid!" groaned the poor man.

The next moment he was summoned to the general's chamber. A violent ringing of the bell succeeded; and the voice of the surgeon was heard

directly after, reiterating his commands to the servant.

"Fly, as if for your life!" said he; "bring Mr. Haslop back with you as speedily."

The additional surgeon arrived. Again hours of suspense succeeded; again the lawyer was introduced; and the surgeons declining to give an opinion, withdrew to an adjoining chamber, where dinner was served to them.

Mr. Mortlake, like the surgeon, seemed to find the work for which he had been summoned beyond his skill; and Mrs. Ashenhurst, who was now sufficiently collected to take note of whatever occurred, had a new subject of speculation afforded her by hearing that a second lawyer was also summoned with as much despatch as possible.

In the course of the evening Lord Cornbury called — called again with his solemn condolence, and offers on the part of his nephew, who feared he had displeased Miss Ashenhurst from the coldness with which she treated him, that he might be permitted to remain in the house through the night, in order that he might render any possible assistance either to General Dubois or to the ladies. Mrs. Ashenhurst most willingly

assented, declaring that any gloom which appeared on her daughter's countenance arose from anxiety for her uncle—"she was so extremely attached to her uncle!"

As the night set in, Mr. Conyers Freemantle took his place by the drawing-room fire; Mrs. Ashenhurst, in a rich cloak and shawl, reclining in a large easy-chair, now feebly talking over "these melancholy events," and now dosing into pleasant forgetfulness. The lady's silken repose was contagious, and Mr. Conyers Freemantle also dozed in his chair. In a while, however, the lady's sleep went from her; and as she lay with her eyes open looking to the richly ornamented ceiling, she began to look forward into the future. How bright it all appeared! There was in it neither pride, power, nor pain; neither the haughty Jacquetta to frown her into insignificance, the general to control her, nor her daughter's tearful eyes to fill her with an uneasy sympathy. "We shall have everything our own way then," thought she; "and then it will be *my* turn to frown on the haughty Jacquetta. And Jane, poor girl! shall certainly not marry this man. There's my Lord Montjoy coming down in the autumn; we'll choose

a better match for her than this Conyers Freemantle, whom, after all, I never did like!" The ornaments of the ceiling might have been diamonds and rubies, so bright did they seem to the upturned vision of the pillowed lady. But we will leave her to her pleasant fancies, and look after the sterner realities of the night.

Jane all this time remained in her chamber in the deepest anxiety and distress of mind, believing herself the cause, though innocent of this terrible event; and many and fervent were the prayers she put up that her uncle's life might not at this time be required from him.

In the general's chamber too all was agitation and anxiety. The lawyers sat together, pale and perplexed: the wounded man at one moment dictated to them what they should write, and the next broke forth into terrible imprecations on his enemy; then gave way to frantic passion, threatening to tear off his bandages,—or lay back on his pillow, struggling with apparent agony of mind even more terrible than his bodily pain; the cold perspiration standing on his brow like drops of water, his features compressed; and his hands clenched and wrung together as

if by a vice. The lawyers alternately gave place to the surgeons, and the surgeons to the lawyers —each declaring to the other that it was the most fearful death-bed they had ever witnessed. The work of the lawyers was at last completed; and the surgeons with pale lips and low voices declared that the most fatal symptoms had appeared, and suggested to him, that if he wished to see his relatives, or to see any other friend, it would be well to do it soon.

"I know how it is!" said the general, in his customary bland voice—so different to what he had lately spoke with, that the surgeons started to hear it;—"I know how it is—I shall die!—I shall die!" screamed he forth in the high key of his fury, as if addressing some far off being—"I shall die!"

"Fetch me here a minister of the Church of England," said he, in a tone of absolute command: "and are you furnished as I ordered, Mr. Mortlake?"

The gentleman in question assured him that his commands had been attended to. The surgeon besought him to be calm, as he endangered his life by these efforts.

"Fools!" exclaimed he, in a tone of increasing irritation; "you know I cannot live!"

He then ordered additional lights to be brought; and the surgeons, thinking he was about to receive the sacrament, assisted the valet to arrange the room.

The minister entered, and the general bade him take his place at the right hand of the bed.

"Bid Mrs. Ashenhurst, her daughter, and Mr. Conyers Freemantle to hasten hither," he said in a hurried voice.

Again the surgeons prayed him to to be composed; and the clergyman in his most persuasive tones began to speak of the holy calm of his spirit.

"Fools!" again exclaimed he, waving them back with a voice and gesture of infinite contempt.

The three who had been summoned entered: Mrs. Ashenhurst weeping violently, both from real agitation of feeling, and the effect the whole scene had on her nerves. Jane heard nothing, saw nothing, but her uncle: all past annoyances —all past provocation was forgotten; she saw only the generous, munificent relative who had raised them from obscurity to unbounded afflu-

ence, and who now lay at the point of a horrible death, as she believed through her own indirect agency.

"My beloved uncle," said she, falling on her knees at his bed-side, and kissing his hand tenderly, "pardon me if I have ever displeased you—if I have been the means of your suffering thus!"

"Rise, Miss Ashenhurst," said the general, interrupting her; "the time is short—rise!"

Jane obeyed trembling. The general took her hand, and looked fixedly in her face. "I have loved you, Jane," he said; "you will find that I have loved you—you must now obey me!"

The calm, low, sweet tone of voice in which this was said, overcame her, and she wept bitterly. He then took the hand of Mr. Conyers Freemantle and joined it to hers. Both started—a sudden revulsion seemed to turn Jane's heart to stone; she would have withdrawn her hand, but it was too firmly held.

"What hinders it," said the general, "that these two be not even now united in matrimony?"

The second lawyer produced a special license and ring, and the clergyman stepped forward.

"No, no!" screamed Jane, snatching back her hand; "it shall not be—it cannot be!"

Mr. Conyers Freemantle besought her to consent.

"Jane!" said the general, in a tone that touched her soul; "I am dying, and I beseech of you to marry this man!"

"Oh, sir!" said Jane, passionately, "I cannot—indeed I cannot!"

"Tell me not of inclination! tell me not of love!" said he, in a deep solemn voice, as if she had spoken of them; "tell me not of passion! It is a dying man who warns you not to trust in these things—it is a dying sinner who warns you that these things have brought damnation to his soul!"

Jane felt as if her existence was withered up before these blasting words. A silence like death was in the room—the general sank back upon his pillow, and the surgeons rushed to the bed. For five minutes he lay in one of those convulsions of mental agony which seemed to rack him like an instrument of torture; and Mrs. Ashenhurst venturing one glance on his distressed and distorted countenance, shut her eyes and buried her face in her handkerchief.

General Dubois seemed angry when he woke to the presence of so many spectators.

"Come, come," said he, starting up in his bed, "what folly is this! Reverend sir, do your office. Mr. Conyers Freemantle, you must receive your bride from my hands."

"Brother," said Mrs. Ashenhurst, "delay it, I beseech you, till your recovery!"

"I am dying!" he exclaimed, "and thou knowest it, woman!"

Mrs. Ashenhurst felt like a crushed worm.

The clergyman stepped up to Jane, and prayed her to comply with "the not unreasonable wishes of her dying relative." Mr. Freemantle attempted to take her hand: Jane put him back, and knelt at her uncle's bed.

"Ask my submission—my obedience, in any way but this!—for with this I cannot comply!"

The general made no answer; and Jane prayed fervently in spirit that this great trial might pass from her.

"It will never be done if it be not done now!" said the general, in a low, awful voice, indistinct beyond the bed, and which no one

heard but herself. A deep thankfulness filled her soul, and she rose from her knees.

"No! no!" cried the general aloud, but in a broken voice; "it is only thus that I require obedience! It must be now—I am dying—it must be now!" said he, again sinking back on his pillow. Again the alarmed surgeons flew to his bed-side.

"Jane!" shouted the general, again raising himself suddenly.

"For God's sake, sir, compose yourself!" said the surgeons.

"Mr. Freemantle!" shouted the general, "on your soul promise me to marry my niece!"

"I promise!" replied he.

"My friend," said the calm voice of the clergyman, "leave these things for the higher concerns of your immortal soul!"

The surgeons consulted quickly together. Mrs. Ashenhurst, her daughter, and Mr. Conyers Freemantle were requested to leave the room. Lock-jaw and paralysis had come on, and immediate death was apprehended.

In the course of the early morning, General

Dubois expired. Mr. Freemantle, after proffers of the most willing service, retired to Berkeley-square; and Mrs. Ashenhurst retired to rest. Jane's heart meantime was agitated by the most conflicting sensations and emotions; — sincere thankfulness to Heaven that she had been delivered from this hateful marriage, while she deplored with tears the awful cause of its interruption. Self-reproaches filled her spirit for many a by-gone rebellious feeling towards her uncle, and then came rushing over her mind the memory of many a gift nobly given, and the poor girl wept with an entire abandonment to sorrow. Sincere and earnest, too, were the prayers she put up to the Throne of Grace on his behalf. The proud sinner who cared not for his own soul died not unpleaded for; and mercy, perchance, abated somewhat of his penalty for her sake!

The curiosity of Mrs. Ashenhurst respecting the general's penitential garments, or whatever the mystery might be, was only the more stimulated by finding that the surgeon who had first attended him was bound to remain with the body during the performance of those rites which the dead require, and which were performed by the

confidential valet and an old woman, a perfect stranger to the household, introduced by the surgeon for the purpose.

All Mrs. Ashenhurst could learn was, that the cartilage of the nose had been pierced, and appeared at some time to have suspended a ring, and that one toe of each foot had been amputated. The surgeon never left the body until it was enclosed within its shell.

CHAPTER XX.

Of course the sensation which the death of General Dubois, and the occasion of it, produced was immense. Sir Harbottle Grimstone had left London, and fled no one knew whither: it was conjectured that he had gone abroad. But neither with the public nor with Sir Harbottle have we any immediate concern.

The beatific vision which Mrs. Ashenhurst had indulged in her chair was no little deranged by this closing scene in the general's life. It was evident that, from some unknown cause, he not only favoured the suit of Mr. Conyers Freeman-

tle, but was extremely anxious for its accomplishment; she did not doubt, therefore, but that accomplishment was rigorously provided for in the will—perhaps the very heritage itself might depend on that condition. This new view of the case, therefore, of necessity altered again the tortuous line of her conduct: for the present, at least, Mr. Conyers Freemantle must be treated as the son-in-law elect—all future conduct towards him would depend upon the will. "Besides," argued her entire selfishness, "better far that Jane should reject him herself, if rejection is possible. I stand committed with my friends the Cornburys, and their countenance will matter nothing to her with the new connexions she will form; but there is no reason why I should needlessly affront my old friends."

It was late the next morning when Jane woke from the heavy sleep into which she had fallen long after daybreak. It was a melancholy waking to the business of the day. Her first thoughts were of him who but a few hours before had been so full of life and strength and passion, but who now lay a disfigured corpse in a near chamber;—of him who had so fearfully passed from time to

eternity amid the agonising conflicts of a troubled spirit, violent and unaccomplished wishes, and severe bodily suffering—like an angry sun setting among tempestuous clouds. No wonder that her spirit felt sad and desolate: yet, as her mind became accustomed to the awful strangeness of these events, she could not but take a hasty prospective view of her suddenly altered fortunes; but, unlike her mother, there was no general plan of conduct to be altered. She had no doubt but that she was the heiress of her uncle's immense wealth; she had no doubt, either, of his strong desire that she should unite herself to Mr. Conyers Freemantle: but she felt that a high and holy duty—higher and holier than mere obedience to wishes unexplained and apparently capricious—forbade such a union, — nay, though the very inheritance itself depended upon it; for, in common with her mother, she thought the will might restrict her as to marriage; and yet, when she remembered the muttered words of her uncle, "that the marriage never would take place if it remained then unaccomplished," she felt a strong persuasion that it would leave her free as regarded *him*, and for this she was thank-

ful beyond the power of words. She determined, therefore, that, since nothing could be positively decided till the will was known, though she would avoid Mr. Conyers Freemantle as much as possible, and give him no reason to expect other than her decided rejection, yet she would not make him the cause of debate and misunderstanding with her mother.

Mr. Conyers Freemantle, too, had his thoughts. Jane's coldness—her avoidance of his presence—the horror with which she shrank from his touch, had all roused his self-love to the direst pitch of resentment. Love, admiration were gone: what he craved after now was revenge!—and revenge he vowed to himself he would have in performing the promise made to the dying man, assuring himself that Jane was bound by the will to marry no one but himself.

Never had Mr. Conyers Freemantle felt so strong to act, so filled with determinate character, before. He went to his bed in the full intention of his purpose, he rose with it equally energetic. He moved, he looked, he spoke unlike himself—unlike the man of uncertain purpose, who had hesitated hitherto, and puzzled himself in the

mazes of his own feeble-mindedness. He was great in this one purpose of accomplishing revenge upon the despiser of a Conyers!

Lord and Lady Cornbury could not but observe his altered demeanour; but they, good, easy people, thought it was all in the nature of things,—he had so much to think about, he had such serious business on his hands; but they were glad to see him so cheerful!

Miss Jacquetta Freemantle knew better than they; she knew that no ordinary cause could have wrought him to this pitch of decision, of earnestness, almost fierceness of eye. He had determined with himself to stand alone and take counsel with no one in the unwonted strength of his new energy,—especially he meant that his sister should have no hand in it: but the wily Jacquetta compassed him about with her snares, and, before he was aware, she was possessed of his secret. It was little that the haughty Jacquetta spoke; but that little confirmed her brother in his purpose, and established an entire working together through the future of this affair. Jacquetta was satisfied,—her brother too was in her power; and she then sat down to luxuri-

ate on the meditated body-and-soul subjection of their intended victim.

The morning of the general's death, Mr. Mortlake, attended by the confidential valet, set off for Denborough Park, to carry thither the melancholy tidings, and to take possession of the place.

Lord and Lady Cornbury, apparently more interested in Mrs. Ashenhurst and her daughter than ever, were full of attention and kindness; and the Honourable Miss Jacquetta Freemantle, in her haughtiness, condoled on the melancholy event.

General Dubois was to be buried in the tomb which he had built for himself at Denborough Park, and Mr. Conyers Freemantle undertook to accompany the body on its stately homeward journey; while the Cornburys, with Miss Freemantle, proposed returning to Wilton at the same time that Mrs. Ashenhurst and her daughter returned to Denborough Park. The whole journey was to be accomplished as speedily and as secretly as possible.

Mrs. Ashenhurst merely remained in London to give orders respecting the mourning dresses

which were to be sent after them; and, in two days' time Jane found herself travelling on the road by which so lately she had arrived in London. How different was that time and the present! "Surely never," thought Jane, "did contrasts so sad and singular meet in any life before! So lately as he was with us travelling upon this very road, who now will follow us,—a corpse! Again, not twelve months past, we two who now sit side by side, so sat when we were driven from Harbury, on our journey to Denborough Park!" A deep melancholy fell on her spirit as she mused on these things—on this mingled retrospect, and all it brought with it, more splendid than consoling, much fuller of sorrowful experience than of even passing gladness.

Mrs. Ashenhurst, too, was deeply occupied by her own meditations; but they were entirely prospective, and very little varying from her former meditations. It is true that occasionally they were diversified by the recollection of Brian Livingstone, and Jane's pertinacious and determined attachment to him; but then she consoled herself with the thought that the prohibition which sundered them in the general's lifetime, no doubt

would be in full operation even after his death, through his will. But, cogitate as she would, puzzle herself with difficulties as she might for a time, the result was always satisfactory; her daughter was the heiress of General Dubois!

That Mrs. Ashenhurst felt either regret or sorrow for the death of her brother, now the agitation and first shock was over, may, by no means, be asserted. Still, a feeble sort of conventional mourning pervaded her manners and mingled with her conversation. She looked the melancholy gentlewoman most gracefully, and with inimitable propriety alluded to the "dear deceased," her "poor, dear relative," and her "late loss." Nothing could have been more unexceptionably supported than the character of mourner through the journey; while she internally congratulated herself on always being said to look well in mourning, especially as she had not to assume the weeds of a widow, and that the handsome mourning dresses which had been ordered for Jane would become her beautifully, especially since her countenance had so much more thoughtful an expression. But perhaps the most interesting subject of thought and speculation

with Mrs. Ashenhurst we have yet omitted,—the access she should now assuredly get into the mysterious chamber, together with a knowledge of what the iron chest contained.

Let us, therefore, pass over the remainder of the journey, and even their drive through Harbury,—so different from the last, and yet withal a species of triumph to Mrs. Ashenhurst, inasmuch as they were the objects of intense interest, and appeared to be now going to the full possession of their glory, even though under a temporary cloud.

All this we will leave, and accompany Mrs. Ashenhurst the morning after her arrival into the general's apartment.

It was with a palpitating heart and a timid step that she entered it, as if fearful of making palpable the invisible presence which even then might lie within its walls. The room itself was no way extraordinary, furnished, like the rest of the house, with the utmost attention to luxurious ease; yet this very absence of anything peculiar to fix the mind upon seemed to give a suspicious character to the most common of its furniture. In what apparent respects did the easy-

chair in which he had reclined seem different to the one in her own chamber? Yet she shuddered at the thought of sitting in it, in the same way that one who suspects poison shrinks from a cup of sparkling wine. But, of a veritable truth, the mysterious chest, of which so much had been said, stood at the bed's head, barred and cross-barred with iron, as if it secured the wealth of a kingdom, or held within it an evil genius! Mrs. Ashenhurst did not dare to lay even a finger upon it. The guilt, the mystery, whatever it were, was connected, she doubted not, with the contents of that chest!

As she more calmly considered it, when the first excitement of the discovery was over, she was surprised to see, that though to every other chest, and cabinet, and lock in the room, the seal of Mr. Mortlake was affixed, this was without. Here was a strange subject of speculation. Had Mr. Mortlake in very terror forborne to acknowledge it as a part of the general's property, or had the imprisoned mystery defied the bondage of a human seal? As she was thus pondering in a state of highly-excited curiosity, the door immediately before her, not the one by which

she had entered, slowly began to open. She saw the noiseless turning of the lock-handle and the opening advance of the door with the freezing horror of one who believes himself in the coming presence of a spectre. The door opened scarcely one foot's space, and the figure of the valet presented himself. Seeing her before him, he appeared not less astounded than herself, and was about to make a hasty retreat. Mrs. Ashenhurst, who instantly suspected the man's design to be the searching of this mysterious chest, which he had purposely kept from the knowledge of Mr. Mortlake, bade him come forward.

"Robert," said she with great severity, "you are detected!—come forward!"

The man obeyed, pale and trembling: he had the nabob's keys in his hand.

"What are the contents of this chest?"

"I—I know not, my lady;—indeed, my lady, I never saw!"

"Your design was to see—and the keys are now in your hand!"

The man looked like a thief caught in the fact.

"Have you courage to open that chest?" asked she. There was something in the question, or

in the tone in which it was put, that reassured him.

"If you wish it, I can try, ma'am," was his answer.

"Have you ever seen it opened?"

"No, ma'am; General Dubois only opened it of nights, ma'am—and there was something queer about it; I never could shift it then, though he *could* easy enough; and now one may move it and welcome," said the valet, as if willing to bribe his lady with information which he had tact enough to see she was eager to obtain.

"Do you then say it is light?"

"No, ma'am, not light, but so as a man may move," said he, shoving it half an inch along the floor.

"Open it!" said Mrs. Ashenhurst.

The valet selected a key and applied himself to the task, as if this was not the first time he had practised the mystery.

The sensation at the heart of Mrs. Ashenhurst cannot be told, as she saw the terrible lid about to move—about to reveal whatever mystery lay below it;—nor can any one easily appreciate the coolness and self-command with which she turned

to the valet, as she compelled herself to look in—throwing the whole onus of the search upon him.

"You see, sirrah!—a human skeleton—are you satisfied? Close it instantly! and fetch hither Mr. Mortlake to affix his seal!"

The artifice was successful; the valet, confounded and ashamed, closed the chest in humble submission, gave the keys into her hand, and went to do her bidding. The keys dropped from her hand with perfect loathing, and she struggled with a horror that crept to her very heart; here then was the mystery of iniquity—the miserable remains of a human body!

"This chest, sir, awaits your seal!" said she with a desperate calmness as Mr. Mortlake entered the room.

"I have looked in vain for that chest!" he replied; "having received from General Dubois especial orders concerning it."

The tongue of Mrs. Ashenhurst clove to the roof of her mouth; and Mr. Mortlake taking a paper from his pocket-book, read in the general's handwriting—

"I, Francis Dubois, solemnly enjoin upon those who commit my dust to the grave to lay also

with it a certain iron chest, standing at my bed's head—and that, unopened, as it remains; as they trust to their own soul's repose!"

"See that it remains inviolate," said Mrs. Ashenhurst as she left the room, disappointed and yet filled with a new and horrible subject for mysterious wonder—wonder too which she was bound to keep in her own breast, and which she believed the valet, for his own credit, would also conceal. The valet, however, disappeared from Denborough Park that day, decamping, it was imagined, with treasure to an untold value, the jewels of the carbuncle-reputation never being found. The immediate pursuit of him was unsuccessful; and after events diverted the attention of all parties to even more momentous subjects of interest.

CHAPTER XXI.

We will now pass over a space of ten days, and then look into the saloon the morning after the sumptuous funeral had been performed; assuring our readers that the nabob's magnificence

in life was not disgraced by his consignment to the tomb, and that, together with his crimson-velvet-covered coffin, went into holy earth the other mysterious remains in their iron bondage,—no small sum being paid to the church for admission, and that only on the secret assurance of Mrs. Ashenhurst to the bishop that it contained merely human dust, according to her solemn belief.

In the saloon then, which was hung with black velvet, sat, in her graceful mourning, Mrs. Ashenhurst, full of the dignity of place; Jane Ashenhurst, beautiful, most touchingly beautiful, and solemnly interested as she was in all that went forward; — Lord and Lady Cornbury, silent, and with countenances as placidly unmeaning as ever; — the Honourable Miss Jacquetta Freemantle, and her honourable brother, who already looked round in proud anticipatory possession of this stately mansion, its great wealth and its fair mistress; — all likewise in mourning.

Below them, and at a table, sat Mr. Mortlake and his brother lawyer, who had come down for the occasion; "an unnecessary expense," said Mrs. Ashenhurst; "but he had insisted upon it, and he came." There they sat, like solemn judges at a

tribunal, the tied-up and sealed document before them, which they seemed reluctant to open.

"It is a painful duty which devolves upon me —an extremely painful duty!" said Mr. Mortlake, as he slowly broke the seals, and then held the open parchment in his hands.

The assembled company started; but Mrs. Ashenhurst thought it was merely a form of words with which this gentleman prefaced such an office.

The whole room was a hush like death, and the deep voice of Mr. Mortlake read, as if the parchment spoke from the tomb,

"In the name of God, Amen.

"I, Francis Dubois, sound in mind, but wounded to death by my enemy Sir Harbottle Grimstone, Bart., whom may the fiends confound! seeing I am summoned from the deeds of the body to the judgment of the soul;—

"I, Francis Dubois, on this the twenty-seventh of May, in the year of our Lord seventeen hundred and ——, in my hired house in Grosvenor-square, make this my last will and testament, to the cancelling of any former will or deed whatsoever.

"My house, park, lands, manors, situate in the parish of Denborough, in the county of ——; to-

gether with whatever furniture the house contains, and whatever treasure in jewels, bullion, or coined money may be found in any chest, cabinet, or under any lock whatever — excepting the iron chest which stands at my bed's head; together with my Indian spoil and articles of wearing apparel, my silver plate in daily use, and whatever the plate-chest, standing in the butler's room, also contains; several pieces of gold and silver brocade, silk-stuffs, and velvets; rings, buckles, and other personal jewels; clocks, cabinets, statues, and pictures, all and sundry which the house contains, excepting the iron chest aforesaid—my carriages, horses, harness, and whatever is contained within my stables, carriage-houses, stable-yards, and stack-yards; together with all implements of husbandry whatsoever;—in fine, all my real and personal property whatsoever and wheresoever found, saving and excepting what is hereinafter named, I give and bequeath—" Mr. Mortlake wiped the perspiration from his brow—"I give and bequeath, with my eternal curse, to Sir Harbottle Grimstone, Bart. aforesaid——"

Jane started to her mother's side, who, with a scream of horror, had fallen back in a swoon.

"My good sir!" exclaimed Lord Cornbury.

Mr. Conyers Freemantle started to his feet, and protested that it was beyond his comprehension.

Miss Jacquetta looked on Mrs. Ashenhurst and her daughter in cruel triumph.

Lady Cornbury opened her eyes, and wondered what it meant.

"Be calm, dearest, dearest mother!" said Jane, as Mrs. Ashenhurst started up in frenzy.

"This is a colleaguing with Sir Harbottle Grimstone!" said she. "The will, Mr. Mortlake, is a forgery!"

"Madam," said Mr. Mortlake calmly, "the disposition of the property was not less astounding to myself than to you; and therefore I required the assistance of my friend Mr. Villars, and his presence at this trying moment."

"The will shall not stand, sir!" said Mrs. Ashenhurst in haughty indignation. "Read on, sir, and let us hear what further iniquities it contains!"

Mr. Mortlake bowed and read on.

"Not from love or favour make I this be-

quest, but from the eternal hatred I bear him the said Sir Harbottle Grimstone, Bart. and for the sake of the hatred I conceived for him when we first met; and because I know of a surety that these things which are bequeathed to him by myself, Francis Dubois, can never do him good: on the contrary, that certain ruin, misery, and perdition will cling to him who inherits them, to him and to his heirs;—wherefore, lies among the great secrets which the judgment-day will reveal,—therefore shall the inheritor be mine enemy Sir Harbottle Grimstone, Bart. aforesaid; and hereby I am revenged."

"My good sir," said Lord Cornbury, "my unfortunate friend could not have been in *sound* mind."

"Certainly not!" said Mrs. Ashenhurst, "here are evident signs of insanity!"

Mr. Mortlake shook his head. "Mr. Villars," said he, "you can bear testimony to this subject!"

Mr. Villars declared it to be his solemn opinion that General Dubois was of perfectly sound mind; there was no evidence whatever to

the contrary—nothing, in fact, could have been cooler or clearer, or more collected, than his conduct during the whole time they were together.

"But," said Mr. Mortlake, "I foresaw this suggestion, and obtained therefore the evidence of the medical men on this subject." He produced a paper signed to the same purpose by both surgeons.

Mr. Conyers Freemantle stood leaning with his two palms on the table; Mrs. Ashenhurst likewise remained standing; Lord Cornbury drew his chair to the table; and Mr. Mortlake taking up the parchment, again read.

"To my sister, Katherine Ashenhurst, widow of Captain James Ashenhurst of the Life-Guards, deceased, I leave—nothing——"

Jane again started to her mother's side; but her mother put her back with indignation. The face of Mrs. Ashenhurst was first crimson and then deadly pale, but she stood firm.

"Read on, sir!" she said.

A laugh-like sound was heard from the chair where the haughty Jacquetta sat. Lord Cornbury was the only person who turned round to notice it.

"Read on, sir!" repeated Mrs. Ashenhurst, as Mr. Mortlake still paused.

"—I leave nothing, because her weak mind can submit to all circumstances, and she has already assured me of cheerful submission."

Mrs. Ashenhurst still stood calm, though the crimson again mounted into her face and she would gladly have sunk into the earth, and though again the triumphing laugh of Miss Jacquetta Freemantle sounded through the room.

"To my niece Jane Ashenhurst, daughter and sole child of the aforesaid Katherine Ashenhurst, I bequeath the sum of ten thousand pounds funded property, being the fruit of honourable military service in the colony of Madras."

"This," said Mr. Mortlake, "is the substance of the will; and then follows a more circumstantial reiteration of the whole, mainly intended for the secure bequeathing of his landed and other property to Sir Harbottle Grimstone, which it would perhaps be unpleasant for you to hear."

"Does not my name occur in the will?" asked Mr. Conyers Freemantle.

Mr. Mortlake either did not hear or did not choose to answer the question. "Sir Willoughby

Doyne and Mr. Fawcett," continued he, "are there named as executors, and, at my instance, they wait without for admission; but it appeared to me better," said he, "that you should know the nature of the will first — their presence might have been unpleasant to you."

"We are extremely obliged, sir," said Mrs. Ashenhurst in scorn and indignation; "but this precious document shall never stand!"

"Madam," said Mr. Mortlake, "you deceive yourself!"

"The will is certainly unjust, sir, and a most extraordinary will, sir!" interrupted Lord Cornbury: "Miss Ashenhurst is unquestionably the true heir!"

"My dear lord!" said Mrs. Ashenhurst, the floodgates of her excited feelings opened by his apparent sympathy, "is it not a cruel will? is it not a most unfeeling, a most absurd will? If it could be set aside," said she, in a confidential tone, addressed as much to Mr. Mortlake as to Lord Cornbury, "my daughter would be heir-at-law. Cannot it be done?"

Mr. Mortlake shook his head.

"Oh, sir," continued she, compelled to speak

plainer, "the law can do anything—such things are done every day: what need to say anything of this will—this absurd, this ridiculous will, at all? What claim has Sir Harbottle on our property? Nothing need be said of this will—we are all friends here together. Gentlemen, it shall be worth your while!"

"Dearest mother, no!" said Jane.

"Madam, madam, you are mistaken," said Mr. Mortlake hastily; "this is such a thing as *the law* cannot do! My good lady, I beseech you to think of what you are suggesting!"

"Is there no mention of me in this will?" again asked Mr. Conyers Freemantle.

"Of you, sir!" exclaimed Mrs. Ashenhurst, turning the wrath upon him which she dared not pour out on the lawyers; "and what right have *you* to suppose you are mentioned in the will?"

Mr. Conyers Freemantle both looked and felt chagrined, but he kept his eye on Mr. Mortlake.

"Your name, sir, does not occur in the will at all!" replied the lawyer.

"Humph!" said the disconcerted gentleman, and began to wish himself away.

"The will shall not stand," again said Mrs. Ashenhurst, forgetting the temporary diversion of her thoughts,—"The will shall not stand if there is a power on earth to set it aside! It is an iniquitous will!" repeated she in a voice approaching to frenzy.

"Mother," said Jane, "let us withdraw."

"Gentlemen," continued Mrs. Ashenhurst, disregarding her daughter, "if there is power on earth to do it, this will shall be set aside!"

"Madam, I wish you joy of your legacy," said Miss Jacquetta Freemantle, rising, with the most withering scorn, herself more mortified and chagrined than she had ever been before,—"I wish you joy of your legacy, madam!" and with a laugh like a hyena she swept out of the apartment.

Lady Cornbury looked round like one aghast when she was gone, and taking the arm of Mr. Conyers Freemantle, she went quietly out after her; he glad of what seemed like an excuse for his withdrawing.

"Let us leave the room, dearest mother," again said Jane; "Sir Willoughby Doyne will do

what is right — his lordship will do what is right!"

"Go, if you will!" replied she in violent anger; "but I will stay!"

Jane withdrew to her own apartment—her own no longer, and sat down to contemplate this strange termination of their vision of splendour. Surprise and disappointment she certainly felt, and an unpleasant consciousness of the world's coming wonder and idle pity; but her greatest concern was on her mother's account, to whom this was worse even than a death-blow. The agony of her feelings was a deep, living sympathy with her mother: for herself, Jane knew there could and must yet be happiness and blessings in store; but for her, thus insulted—thus degraded—thus stripped of what made all the glory and desirable ness of life, there seemed nothing but darkness and death.

What took place in the saloon after Jane left it, we know not: in an hour's time Mrs. Ashenhurst was supported to the room where her daughter sat, in violent hysterics. Rage the most ungovernable succeeded her restoration; she was

frantic with disappointment and anger, and Jane, bewildered and terrified, knew not what to do. The Cornburys were gone, and as hour after hour passed on and no message came from them, either of condolence or sympathy, Jane began to suspect that yet another cutting pang, the neglect and desertion of friends, would be added to her other sorrows.

In the course of the evening, Mrs. Ashenhurst, exhausted with the vehemence of her excitement, sank into a profound and death-like sleep, which might have been mistaken for death, but for the spasm-like starts which shook her whole frame at intervals. Jane sat by her mother's bed alone, and no wonder that, as the deepening twilight filled the chamber with yet heavier gloom, the full bitterness of this disappointment — the peculiar difficulty of their situation, fell sadly on her spirit. She felt that they were objects of strange and vulgar wonder to the very domestics; that they had been cruelly, wantonly betrayed by their relative; — they had been mocked by the presence of their enemies, as she deeply felt the Freemantles to be; — they were deserted by their friends the Cornburys; — and now, with no one to

counsel, no one to sympathise with her, she sat by the bed of her mother, who already seemed fallen a victim to this cruel shock. At this very moment her maid informed her that a gentleman waited in the saloon to see her: he had refused to give his name, but said he came from Harbury and wished particularly to see Miss Ashenhurst.

"Good heavens!" thought Jane, "can it be Brian Livingstone? What a comfort—what a mercy if it be!" She consigned her mother to the watchfulness of her maid, and with a beating heart, hoping and fearing, hastened to the saloon.

The saloon was lighted up as usual; but its black hangings gave a general sombre effect, and for the first moment she did not see who awaited her. A sound of low whistling, however, the next moment directed her to an Indian screen, within which stood the unshapely figure of Mr. Parkinson, resting on his two stout legs, set apart to command solidity of base, and his arms akimbo, in the act of surveying the room. What an unpleasant apparition!—What a revulsion of feeling! Mr. Parkinson, instead of Brian Livingstone! Jane felt sick at heart, and would have

stolen back as silently as she had entered, but at that moment he faced about.

"Oh, Miss Jane! why I didn't hear you come in! How do ye do? Bad job this of your uncle dying! I was just travelling this way, and thought I must look in on you. Zounds! it 's a bad job!—Well! and how 's my old friend Mrs. Ashenhurst?"

Jane replied coldly, that her mother was not well.

"Egad, Miss Jane, you have managed badly somehow, to let the old fellow leave his money from you in this way!"

"Mr. Parkinson," said Jane, "my attendance is required elsewhere,—I must wish you a good evening."

"Oh, no offence sure, Miss Ashenhurst,—no offence, I hope; but you see this is a thing everybody talks of. Why, they've got the story at Wood Leighton there, as pat as can be; and I'll tell you what now,—there 's a pretty little house of mine at Harbury as will just suit you—moderate rent."

"I must wish you a good evening," said Jane with apparent indifference, and left the room,

feeling now indeed the humiliation of this event. Her heart was full to overflowing; nor did she return to her mother's bed-side till she had wept away some of the excess of her feelings in her own room.

"Hollo!" said Mr. Parkinson, seeing her gone; "why, bless my soul, she's touchy! Ha! ha! this is a pretty coming down, after all my lady's airs!"

"Sir?" said a footman entering.

"What! I shan't see Miss Ashenhurst again, shall I?"

"No, sir!"

"Oh, very well!" said Mr. Parkinson doggedly, as he walked slowly down the room, looking first on one hand and then on the other. "Why, you'll have a new master here soon!" said he at length.

"I know nothing about it, sir," was the footman's reply.

"Oh, very well!" repeated Mr. Parkinson, and began to hum a tune, "I should think, young man, you'll hardly suit Sir Harbottle," said he at length in vexation, as the footman stood with the door in his hand.

"Sir, I'll thank you to take your leave!" said the footman.

"Oh, very well, sir!" returned the visiter in great wrath; "but you'll please to remember, sir, that I am a gentleman!"

Scarcely was Mr. Parkinson gone, when Jane was informed that Lady Doyne prayed for an interview with her. There had been a general good understanding with Sir Willoughby Doyne and his lady, but no intimacy, and Jane questioned for a moment whether this might not be an additional insult which her strange fortune subjected her to; but then she remembered that this lady was the friend of Mr. Vigors—and so remembering, granted the interview.

Lady Doyne was a clear-headed, straightforward, kind-hearted woman, and without apology or ceremony, or referring in the remotest manner to what had occurred, introduced her errand: Sir Willoughby and herself prayed Mrs. Ashenhurst and her daughter to remove for the present to their house.

Jane thanked her, but hinted of the Cornburys.

"The Cornburys," said Lady Doyne, without

explaining herself, "are cold-hearted, selfish people; and I have reason to believe, my dear, that you will not find a home at Wilton."

Jane started,—but she remembered the Freemantles.

"I speak advisedly, my dear Miss Ashenhurst," said Lady Doyne in her business-like manner, and Jane forbore to ask any explanation.

We will not go through the arguments used to induce Jane to accede to her proposal. She did succeed, and then remained through the night in the chamber of Mrs. Ashenhurst; Jane the while forgetting her own personal distress in anxiety for her mother, and filled with admiration for the thoughtful, unpretending, frank-hearted kindness of this Samaritan neighbour.

The next day Mrs. Ashenhurst, in the same lethargic state, was removed to the house of their new-found friend,—no message, no token of kindness or care having reached them from Wilton; but Jane hearing from Mr. Mortlake that his lordship was gone to a great cattle-show, and her ladyship about to visit a long-neglected seat at two counties' distance, to which the Freemantles

were to accompany her,—an unheard-of journey for Lady Cornbury.

Let us now hasten over a space of many weeks, leaving untold, for the present, what occurred next at Denborough Park; leaving the world's wonder at these strange events to go by unspoken of; nor will we tell of the devoted attachment of several domestics who prayed to follow the altered fortunes of Jane;—many a poor hired servant bears a truer and a nobler heart than the friends of our prosperity!—and saying nothing of the deep and desolating sickness of mind and body which lay heavy as death on poor Mrs. Ashenhurst: nor will we tell the fearful suspense of Jane's watching, nor the unabated kindness of Lady Doyne.

We must now look in upon a small quiet residence, many—many miles from the scenes of these later events, and there find our former Mrs. Ashenhurst emaciated, shorn as it were of her former honours, the pride and strength of her life gone, a melancholy ruin of her former self, weak in body, and with a total oblivion of memory as to the later years of her life. She is seated, as is her daily wont, in an easy-chair,

with the Book of Common Prayer on a small table before her, from which she reads the lessons for the day many a time in the course of the day, and saying but little, seems yet to take an almost cheerful interest in what passes, however trifling the event. There too sits Jane, the good, dutiful daughter, who, self-forgetting, tended her through her melancholy sickness with holy watchfulness, and now devises a hundred little schemes to amuse and diversify her monotonous life.

Mrs. Ashenhurst and her daughter, even after this cruel destruction of their hopes, were not poor: the gifts alone which they had received from their relative, of themselves, constituted no ordinary wealth; and now, in the elder lady's debility, they were passing rich. At the earnest desire of Jane, Sir Willoughby Doyne had obtained for her this home among strangers; where, unannoyed by passing events—undisturbed even by familiar faces recalling memories which it was only tranquillity to forget, she might devote herself to her mother, and gather about herself, in humble thankfulness, the blessings and amenities of life which yet abundantly remained for her, in unabated strength, clear and even strong

intellect, bright imagination, highly cultivated taste, and, above all, in the holy and cheerful resignedness of her spirit, and its entire trust in Heaven. And here within this new home she had gathered about her her favourite authors, her music, her flowers, her birds. She was not less beautiful than formerly; though with a beauty somewhat less brilliant and joyous, her countenance, like her spirit, was calm. She feared little, now that her beloved mother was restored to her, and little also dared she hope; though her mind many a time reverted to pleasures which she believed never could return, lingering on them, and retracing them, and feeding her soul with visionary things which often left her sadder than they found her.

So sat Jane one afternoon in November, watching the last gleams of red sunlight on the yet unfallen leaves of a young beech-tree, but occupied less by those outward objects than by thoughts which they produced through some mysterious association, when Brian Livingstone again stood at her side. Jane started as if she had seen a spectre, but the eloquent blood spoke a welcome on her cheek and forehead.

"Thank God!" exclaimed Jane involuntarily; "but who told you we were here?"

"I heard it all from a friend of yours," said he, taking her hand tenderly, "I owe this happy meeting to that noble fellow Vigors."

Jane again blushed deeply.

"Thank God, we can yet be happy!" said he, clasping her in a long embrace, and impressing the first kiss he had ever given her upon her glowing forehead: it was such an embrace as a husband might have given a long-parted-from wife. O the perfect happiness of that time! Holy and chastened as their love was from long disappointment, they met, not as lovers for the first time meeting and embracing, but as most dear, long-tried, and long-parted friends. The misery of the past seemed at once annihilated by the present fulness of joy; and, in the midst of their heart-happiness, Livingstone told how Mr. Vigors had sought him out in his foreign wanderings, and joined him at a cottage by the Lake of Geneva; that the most entire friendship had grown up between them, and thence he had come to know the sacrifice which Jane had made for his sake; and at length, through information Mr. Vigors

had received from his friends in England, himself had returned now to claim the happiness which in so great a measure he owed to his noble friend. It was not without emotion that this was either told or listened to; and so the lovers lingered and talked, and lingered yet, till deep twilight had made the colours of the beech-tree one mass of shade.

"Is that Mr. Brian Livingstone's voice?" said poor Mrs. Ashenhurst from the inner apartment, rousing herself up from a nap into which she had fallen. "Do bring him in, Jane; it is so long since I saw him!"

"We have a pretty place here, Mr. Livingstone," said she when he was seated beside her; "a far prettier place than that at Harbury; a much better house, and more servants too. We only wanted you and dear Mrs. Burgoyne to make it perfect. I am very glad to see you!" and she again offered him her hand.

The tears started to his eyes as he heard her speak thus; but he felt it was in mercy she was thus afflicted. What pain and humiliation was spared her by this oblivion of mind!

And now for weeks and weeks the time rolled

on a succession of happiness. Let us again look into this boudoir-like apartment, with its unostentatious comforts and elegancies, on the happy group that sate there one bright morning in April.

"I had such a dream last night of white favours and gloves, of bride-cake and a wedding-ring!" said poor Mrs. Ashenhurst: "I really am glad your wedding is going to be so soon, Jane!"

"We are all glad, dear Mrs. Ashenhurst," said Augusta Livingstone, with an arch smile and bright laughing eyes, a very Euphrosyne in youthful beauty and gladsomeness.

"And so I am to go to Bath with Mrs. Burgoyne; did you say so, Jane love?"

"Yes, my dear mother; so she wishes, if you do not object."

"Oh dear, no, love,—I should like the journey of all things. And you say she has a good house? It must be twenty years since I was at Bath. I shall like it of all things!" And so saying, she turned again to the Prayer Book.

"And pray when is this Mr. Vigors to come?" asked Augusta of her brother.

"He will be here this evening," was his reply.

"And he really is so very handsome?"

"Wonderfully so; and yet unlike any handsome man I ever saw."

"I shall never like him!" said the merry girl. "If you would bespeak my aversion for any man, tell me he is handsome. I hate your handsome men: they have no heart, no sense; they love nothing, they think of nothing but themselves! I never saw a handsome man that I could endure, except yourself, Brian."

"Mr. Vigors is very like Brian," said Jane Ashenhurst.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Augusta, laughing. "The most charming man I ever saw,—the most gentlemanly, the most sensible, polite, and at the same time the most ordinary,—was my old favourite, Sir Garton Jellicos: he was a perfect gentleman! I had serious thoughts of proposing for Sir Garton myself, only there was Lady Jellicos in the way,—dear, good old lady!

"Mr. Vigors!" said the servant, opening the door and ushering in that gentleman.

What a happy meeting was that of these friends! and had a spectator stood by, he would have instantly seen the impression which that

noble countenance made on the hitherto sceptical Augusta Livingstone; she was a convert in half an hour, though she maintained her old opinion in merry wilfulness all the next day. Mr. Vigors did not meet her as a stranger; he knew her frank true-heartedness, and many a high quality of mind, from letters addressed to her brother; and a few weeks made, as my readers may perhaps already have anticipated, two happy couples instead of one. A few months more, and poor Mrs. Ashenhurst dreamt of another wedding on the eve of accomplishment. And so let us leave them—noble, loving hearts, rich in their own exceeding happiness!

DENBOROUGH PARK.

PART II.

THE WORKING OF THE CURSE.

CHAPTER I.

It was full four weeks after the death of General Dubois, while Mrs. Ashenhurst lay to all appearance sick unto death in the house of Sir Willoughby Doyne; and the Freemantles, sister and brother, unable to avenge the affront put on a Conyers, were giving way to that mutual ill-will which thenceforward became a life-long quarrel,—while Mr. Mortlake was sending forth his missives and his emissaries, not only through England, but even on the Continent, in pursuit of the lost legatee,—that Sir Harbottle himself, in the ordinary dress of a small farmer, blue coat, flowered waistcoat, corduroy breeches, and boots, took up his abode at the Half-Moon, a small pub-

lic-house in one of the most retired and out-of-the-world dales in Yorkshire.

It was not an unpleasant life that the baronet led here, giving himself out to be one Mr. Joseph Pickup, a country-gentleman's steward, who had fled from the wrath to come in consequence of an amour with the gentleman's only daughter, mistifying his simple-minded landlord, honest Master Cumber, with stories of the wonderful beauty and cruel fate of his fair Mary Ann. Sir Harbottle talked and drank with whatever chance-guests came to the house; joined the will-peg and nine-pin players, and beat them on their own ground; angled in the brook below for trout; and when nothing better was to be done, sat down with Boniface within the wooden kitchen-screen, over a brown jug and tankard, to talk over those ideal love troubles in which the landlord, honest man, took a wonderful interest. So sat they on the sixth day of Sir Harbottle's sojourn, when Daniel Neal, with his wallet on his back and his staff in his hand, walked into the open kitchen of the Half-Moon.

"A long life to ye, and a happy one, and may ye never know want!" began Daniel as he crossed

the threshold. The next moment he recognised Sir Harbottle. "Now may the saints save us both!" exclaimed he, throwing off at once the whine of the mendicant; "may the saints save us, and give us a happy home in Paradise! And is it me that am the happy man to bring ye the news?"

"What! is he dead, or has he given his consent?" asked Master Cumber, his head full of Sir Harbottle's love-story.

"You 've heard then?" said Daniel.

"No, the deuce, not I!" said Sir Harbottle; "what is it, old fellow?"

"May the saints be about ye, and take away the curse that sticks to the gold! but you 're heir of General Dubois! He 's gone to his reckoning, and, as I hope to sit down with the blessed Saint Patrick himself, nobody 's remembered in his will but yourself!"

"And Miss Mary Ann, is nothing said of her?" asked the compassionate Boniface.

"That 's clear beyond my knowledge," said Daniel.

"Daniel," said Sir Harbottle, "this news of

thine is somewhat of the strangest: thinkest thou that thy head is of the soberest?"

"Now the blessed Mary herself help me," returned the beggar, "as what I have told your honour is true; and more by token, see here what this bit of newspaper says;" and he handed to Sir Harbottle a crumpled and dirty fragment which he had gathered up in his wanderings.

"Now, by Jingo!" shouted Sir Harbottle, striking his fist on the table till it danced again, after he had read the paper, "this is the primest bit of good luck that ever came to a fellow of my inches! Thou art a made man, Daniel; give us that old hoof of thine!" and Sir Harbottle shook the beggar's arm till it seemed hardly a part of his body.

"Give this old fellow to eat and drink the best that the house holds," said Sir Harbottle; "and harkee, Boniface, I must have thy shandry as far as Skipton this blessed day! By Jove, we 'll have rare doings before I 'm a week older!"

"Well, Mr. Joseph, I hope you 'll do what is right by the poor young lady; if so be that her father has left you the money, it could only be that you should marry her!"

Sir Harbottle laughed, and swore, and drank, and roared forth songs of riotous jollity in the excess of his triumphant merriment, till honest Master Cumber thought "of a certainty he was gone clean mad!"

In less than an hour, the shandry, a most primitive vehicle of some two hundred years old, but the only available carriage within ten miles, stood at the door under the conduct of the one-eyed jottery-man of the Half-Moon, who was to bring it back; and into this vehicle, which creaked and swayed under his vigorous person, mounted Sir Harbottle, after he had kissed the rosy wench who served at the Half-Moon, and promised her a blue ribbon for a keepsake; and kissed even the fat Dame Cumber herself, in the midst of her tubs and steam, as she stood brewing for harvest; leaving the perturbed landlord unenlightened as to his intentions respecting the disinherited and much suffering Miss Mary Ann.

"I thought there had been some good in the chap," murmured the discomfited Boniface, as he trailed a chair after him to the open door where the beggar was regaling himself at an

entertainment for which Sir Harbottle had amply paid; "but I fear me he 'll not do the right thing after all."

"As to that," said Daniel, after he had taken a long draught of 'the jolly good ale and old,' "it 's more than I can say; neither Sir Harbottle, nor his fathers before him, have been much famed either for right thinking or right doing."

"What a thick-head thou art!" said Master Cumber disdainfully; "I 'm talking of no Sir Tarbottle, but of yonder young fellow that thou hast sent off as if the devil drove him!"

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Daniel, on whom the potations were already taking effect.

"Dost not remember that this was Mr. Joseph Pickup?" asked Boniface, impatient of his guest's merriment.

Daniel laughed louder than ever. "Thou hast picked up a pretty story," said he; "ha! ha! ha! thou hast been gulled, my fine cock-o'-the-hills! Mr. Joseph Pickup! ha! ha! ha! Sir Harbottle Grimstone, that 's his Christian name and surname to boot!"

"Sir Tarbottle Brimstone!" said Master Cumber, laughing in his turn; "Lord love us!

—Sir Tarbottle Brimstone!—nay, nay, thou'll pass none of thy jokes on me! But, come, come, friend; you've good eating and drinking there, and I'll maybe find you a night's lodging, only tell me what you think he will do? Will he marry her?"

"What! Miss Ashenhurst?" asked Daniel, "the rose and lily of all England! No; by my consent, that he never shall!"

"Well, there never was such a tangled skein in this world before!" exclaimed honest Master Cumber, half bewildered and half angry: "dost thou say he ought not to do what is right by that poor young woman, and he got all her father's fortune! Goodness guide us! this is a beggar's honesty!"

"Look ye, master," said Daniel, facing about on his seat, "I know more about these things than you do. I was with the general—Lord have mercy on his soul—Christ have mercy on his soul!" muttered he rapidly, and crossed himself: "I was with him, I say, in India, where this money was got; and I saw more than I should like to tell, or you would like to hear. That money, Master Landlord, for which a

man sells his soul to the lowest pit of perdition, can do good to neither man nor woman; and Miss Jane Ashenhurst—may the saints love her and give her a good husband!—has had a lucky miss to be left with short-comings. If Sir Harbottle has got the purse, he takes along with it the curse; and there 's a rhyme for you, and that 's lucky."

"Well, it 's clean past my understanding," said the puzzled Boniface.

"I dare say it is," returned Daniel.

"And who is it, dost say, as has left him all this money?" asked Master Cumber.

"General Dubois of Denborough Park, in the county of S——; and a power of money it is."

"And Miss Mary Ann?" asked the landlord, doubtingly; "that is not her real name, is it?"

"Why, no," said Daniel, "I know of no Miss Mary Ann in our parts."

"*What* dost call this chap?" asked Boniface, after a long pause in which Daniel renewed his attacks on the brown jug and the eatables, and poor Master Cumber had vainly tried to disentangle his bewildered brain.

"Sir Harbottle Grimstone," returned Daniel.

"Brimstone!" said Master Cumber, "it has a queerish sound with it."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Daniel, "thou art a rare scholar! Brimstone! it 'll do, it 'll do!"

"Well, I must tell my missis," said the honest man, rising; and, before long, Daniel heard a great uproar among the brewing tubs, occasioned by no less an event than the anger of Dame Cumber who vehemently resented the transformation of Mr. Joseph Pickup into so dubious a personage as Sir Tarbottle Brimstone.

"Begone with you for a nincompoop!" shouted the provoked Dame Cumber, flinging the wooden bowl which she had just been using after her retreating spouse; "begone with you for an old dunderhead, and don't come here slandering honest men with beggar's lies!"

"What, and, so he 's a great gentleman!" said the rosy maiden of the Half-Moon as she again filled Daniel's jug, and had received from him this strange intelligence. "Well, for certain!" added she, blushing yet rosier as she remembered various gallantries that she had received at his hands.

"What do you stand canting here for?" exclaimed the angered landlord, willing to pour upon her the wrath he did not dare to retort upon his wife: "off with you to your scrubbing and scowering,—a lazy baggage!"

"A great gentleman and a baronet!" murmured the retreating maiden to herself. "Well, it 's maybe no better for me!—but, for sure, he 'll remember the ribbon—I would not be without a keepsake!"

Master Cumber again sate down. But let us leave him and Daniel Neal to clear up this entangled story the best they were able, and hasten now to the county, where the return of Sir Harbottle was so eagerly desired; and where, as we may imagine, nothing could exceed the interest and anxiety which his absence excited. Many, too, were the ineffectual means used by his friends—and everybody seemed his friend now—to discover his retreat. Daniel Neal, however, as we have seen, was the first to carry him the tidings, as if he had some mysterious connexion with the nabob's gold.

Sir Harbottle's domestics were all alive. Morning, noon, and night, their business was to look

out for their master; and among them all none were more deeply interested, none more warmly eager for his return, than his poor follower Dummie: and before we introduce Sir Harbottle to his home, to which at this very moment we must imagine him advancing with the utmost possible speed, a word or two must be said on this his humble dependent.

In the very earliest years of Sir Harbottle's manhood, his mother had a fair maiden named Judith, whose rustic beauty drew the admiring gaze of the young profligate. Like many another trusting heart, she was deceived; and the righteous Lady Grimstone, Sir Harbottle's mother, amazed at the damsel's folly, to which she gave a harsher name, cast her forth upon the world, holding up her pious hands at the awful depravity of the sex "now-a-days."

The poor young woman went forth, no one knew whither; and bitter must the hardships have been which she endured, for when, in three years, she returned to the native village of her betrayer, no one recognised her: she was apparently a care-worn, sorrow-stricken woman; resolute, and stern, and sad: and with her came a deaf and dumb

child, her little Edmund, for whom with determined courage she laboured night and day, taking him with her to the harvest-field, or to the gleaning, in almost sullen self-dependence, unbeholden to charity and thankless for compassion. The poor mother made no friends, and she wanted none; all the tenderness and kindness of her heart were centred in her child. Little Edmund, unlike his mother, was a creature of universal sympathies; and, loving all, all loved him in return: in frame he was robust; and, notwithstanding his natural defects, possessed of much personal beauty, with a most extraordinary quickness of intellect. His eye was intelligent and full of observation, and with a sort of intuitive knowledge he seemed to understand whatever was transacted before him, while his imitative powers and his manual dexterity were so great that he succeeded in all the little arts or devices he attempted. But his ruling passion was for dogs and horses; and as the hounds and horses of the Grimstones, always renowned Nimrods, were ever before his eyes,—for the poor mother, from some unknown cause, established herself near the park-gates, though herself never entered the demesne, Dum-

mie, as he was familiarly called, leapt from his mother's arms at the neigh of the horses or the bark of the hounds, or toddled out in his young independence to clap his hands for joy as his favourite quadrupeds passed in and out, or to seduce by his caresses some strong or sleek sagacious hound to play with him, or to lie down with him in the sun, in which way they were not unfrequently found together asleep.

This passion for the four-footed race attracted the attention of grooms and stable-boys, and poor Dummie was indulged with many a ride, and many an introduction to stables and kennels, of which neither Lady Grimstone nor his mother knew anything. The lady at length died; and then the boy, eluding his mother's eye, and disobedient only in this respect, lived half his time among the grooms at the hall.

When Sir Harbottle came to the estate at the death of his father, he found Dummie a fine, well-grown lad of ten years old; active, bold and enterprising, the favourite of huntsman and jockeys, a privileged person both in stable and kennel. The favourite racers and hunters neighed to see him, and the hounds wagged their tails and

laid down their sleek ears at his approach. Sir Harbottle himself caressed the boy, and he, in his turn, felt for Sir Harbottle the strongest attachment. Could poor Dummie have opened his heart to his mother, he would have talked of the baronet as a faithful, affectionate dog would speak of its master, had it the power to do so. His attachment was like that of the animals, a blind indiscriminating love. His eye brightened at his presence; he watched his motions, and anticipated his wishes: he was aware of his coming by some unknown instinct, and ran forth to meet him, to hold his horse's bridle, to hold his stirrup, or perform any office whatever, apparently sufficiently rewarded by the consciousness of serving him, and overpaid by a smile or any passing token of approbation or good-will. It is true, that, like a dog's, his treatment was often not the gentlest; he was the meek recipient of much of Sir Harbottle's wrath, drunken or sober: he was sworn at, menaced, and even beaten by his master; but he resented it not. Though evincing to every one besides, a spirit which would brook neither insult nor wrong, to Sir Harbottle he was attached, faithful, and submissive. In return, Sir Harbottle gave him as

much love as was in his nature to bestow; he loved him like his dogs and his horses. Though poor Judith kept herself as much aloof as heretofore, she no longer forbade her son's going to the hall. "It is his father's house," said she to herself; "and, though I will never ask for a drink of water there, he has a right to as good as it holds!"

When Sir Harbottle left his home for London, poor Dummie drooped and moped about like a dog that had lost his master: he no longer seemed to take pleasure in the society of his old friends the grooms and jockeys; his only companion was Sir Harbottle's favourite horse, and his only pleasure the fondling with the noble creature in his stall, and lying down to sleep under his manger. But when the whole country was astir with inquiries after Sir Harbottle, Dummie went out east and west, north and south, in search of him; aware, spite of his natural impediments, that some great and desirable event awaited his coming.

The morning after the day with which this chapter opened, Dummie rose up at earliest dawn, and, scarcely allowing himself time to take

a hasty breakfast, set out from his home as if filled with a new vivacity. His mother questioned him by signs, to him perfectly intelligible, as to the cause of his excitement; Dummie made her understand that Sir Harbottle was approaching, and, brooking no longer delay, ascended to a hill and stood there looking northward.

"What a poor fool it is!" murmured Judith, as, hour after hour, she looked forth from her door and still saw the speck-like figure of the boy standing on the hill.

Towards noon, poor Dummie, like the hound that again scents his master's coming, and bounds forward to meet him with joyful impatience, ran eagerly down the hill to the high road just as the postchaise came in sight, which was conveying Sir Harbottle homeward. With the peculiar cry of joy which the poor fellow made in his moments of ecstacy, he hailed his master. Sir Harbottle welcomed him as the first confirmation of the good tidings; and, calling to the driver to stop, threw open the door, and, snatching him in, seated him beside him. Dummie looked into his face with his animated intelligent eyes, kissed his hands and his feet, and, when his impatient master

reproved him for his troublesome joy, meekly and gently smoothed down his shoulder with almost imperceptible caresses, or rubbed against the laps of his coat as an affectionate animal might do in the ecstasy of its attachment.

Sir Harbottle Grimstone came home to find the amazing news true to the minutest particular; came home to find all the world his friends; came home to sit down at Denborough Park, its sole lord and master.

A jovial man was Sir Harbottle; and, three days after his return, he made a feast in his house which was to be like the feast of a king. "Whatever is this day eaten or drunk," said the joyful heir, "shall be produced from the new heritage,—oxen and sheep, fish, flesh, and fowl!" Wine and strong drink, whatever furnished forth the potations of the day, Sir Harbottle vowed should be furnished from the nabob's spoil.

Poor Dummie, like all the rest of the household, was full of activity and bustle; and, on the third night after Sir Harbottle's return, accompanied the gamekeepers to take fish from the ponds in Denborough Park. The night, at first still and heavy with an electric atmosphere, be-

came towards morning wild and terrible, with a tremendous storm of thunder. The whole sky was a vault of blackness, momentarily torn asunder with fierce, red, jagged lightning; and the never-ceasing thunder rumbled, and pealed, and echoed from one horizon to the other. The men sheltered themselves through the fiercest of the storm; but Dummie, whose want of hearing closed his soul to what makes the principal terror of a thunder-storm—the appalling sound—exulted in the wildness of the night, and the sublime and terrible beauty of the lightning. As the morning advanced, the storm abated, and the gamekeepers and their attendant fishermen, together with Dummie, sallied forth to take up their night-lines from waters which lay in one of the deepest glens of the park, hidden among old oaks and birches. But no sooner had they reached this place than the storm again collected, concentrating its fury over the hollows in which they stood, as if the very elements resented Sir Harbottle's taking possession of the nabob's wealth.

The storm had abated, and the morning sun, shone out from a cloudless sky over the re-

freshed and dripping earth, when poor Dummie's mother, who, as we have said, had never entered within the park-gates since the day she was driven from the hall in her deep shame, was seen, to the amaze of her neighbours, with her cloak over her head, and in the greatest possible agitation, hastening up the park. Without ceremony or leave-asking, she rushed into the house, and onward to the breakfast-room, where at that early hour she encountered Sir Harbottle alone, taking his morning meal.

"Where is my boy?" exclaimed she.

Sir Harbottle recognised the voice, though the person had long been forgotten. "Bless my life, Judith!" said he, "where have you sprung from?"

"Where is my boy?" again asked the frantic woman.

"What, in Heaven's name, do you mean?"

"Where is that poor dumb lad, your own son, Sir Harbottle?" said she, looking wildly round her. "Oh he is dead! he is dead! I know it!" cried the poor woman. "I saw him this night dead in my dream!"

"Judith!" said Sir Harbottle," is that boy—"

"Your son, Sir Harbottle; as I live, before God, your son and mine!" said the poor woman; "nor should mortal soul have known it, but my agony has wrenched it from me! Where is my poor dumb child?"

Sir Harbottle leaned his head on his hand and was thoughtful. "Come, come, Judith," at length he said, as she reiterated her question, "you are as foolish as ever: I remember your dreams formerly!"

"Man!" said the poor woman, with a voice and gesture of indignant severity, "am I come here to be taunted with those days! Accursed was the hour I saw you first! You were my ruin, and now you are the death of my boy! I dreamed it, Sir Harbottle. Oh Christ! and so as the poor fool loved you!"

"Sit down, Judith, sit down; this is an idle dream," said Sir Harbottle, much disconcerted and offering her money.

"I will never touch your gold, Sir Harbottle!" exclaimed Judith; "I that have sorrowed and suffered unthought of, that have toiled and struggled uncared for, will have none of your gold! I ask nothing of your hands but my poor dumb boy.

Tell me where he is, for I know of a surety he will die in your service!"

"Upon my soul," said Sir Harbottle, "I know nothing of him further than that he went to the glen-pools with the men last night."

"I knew it!" screamed the poor mother, "I knew that he was dead; I saw him drenched with water last night in my dream!"

Sir Harbottle rang the bell.

"Oh the poor fool, the poor dumb fool!" muttered the mother in heart-broken accents; "and he would run through fire and water for him; he would have worn his poor feet off for him; and burnt his fingers to the bone for him! Oh the poor dumb fool, and I knew all along that a curse would come!"

"Where is Dummie?" asked Sir Harbottle of the servant who, after a considerable time, answered his summons.

"Oh, sir!" exclaimed the man in reply.

"I know it!" screamed the mother, "he is dead! Oh, my God, he is dead!" and so saying she rushed past him, as if instinctively, through the well-remembered house to the court-yard, where, blackened by lightning and drenched by

water, lay in truth the body of poor Dummie, which the men had just then brought in, and about which a throng of servants had gathered.

Sir Harbottle fell into deep cogitation; and as he sate, oppressed with sadder reflections than he had ever experienced before, the lamentations of the poor bereaved mother came sorrowfully to his ears.

The awful and sudden death of poor Dummie at this particular time struck all the domestics as an omen of evil, and especially as in her frantic grief the mother spoke mysteriously of the connexion between Sir Harbottle and her son. Sir Harbottle himself was disconcerted by the incident, and drank deeply that day to drown the remembrance of it. One while he poured out volleys of wrath upon all who came near him; again, he vowed with himself, in a fit of half-drunken pity and remorse, to repair the wrongs and bereavement of poor Judith with money, which, according to his ideas, was the universal panacea for heart-griefs as well as worldly wants; yet, spite of his vows of reparation, his sallies of anger, and the potations he swallowed, like all his people, he thought it a bad omen; he remembered the na-

bob's curse; and this—the death of a poor faithful creature in his service, the child of the injured Judith—seemed like a seal to it. But Sir Harbottle was not a man to detain uneasy feelings if it was in human means to dismiss them. A few days went on; the acuteness of this excitement wore off; the world thronged about him with congratulations and felicitations; the feast was holden; and poor Dummie was forgotten.

Sir Harbottle Grimstone sate a jovial man among his boon companions, feasting on the good things which the nabob had provided.

"And Heaven send me," exclaimed he in his elation with a triumphant laugh, as he read to them from his copy of the will the motive of the bequest—"Heaven send me many such enemies, and many such curses!"

Deep and long was the carouse, and Sir Harbottle's oration to his friends was much in this style:

"Egad, I smell the old fox; I fathom the old boy's charitable intentions. He thought me an extravagant dog, and was resolved that I should not want means to take my swing and my destruction. But I will baulk him! Yes, my

lads, I will turn old man; I will set you an example of moderation and economy, such as few of your fathers can show. Oh! this blessed God-send of Indian gold, what miracles shall it not perform on good English ground!

"Doubtless, the worthy nabob had many a pleasant vision of hounds and harlots, and the spending of substance upon riotous living, with a proper sequel of Jews and lawyers, and most melancholy means to patch up and support a broken constitution, a battered estate, and a conscience that, finding sly twinges and a continual crying to no purpose, took to downright slashes and stabs of a most deadly character. But not so! Oh, majestic nabob! hadst thou ten tenements, I will make them a hundred. Hadst thou hundreds of acres, I will make them thousands! Thy copper shall become silver; thy silver, gold; and thy gold as the very mountain of Ophir itself; and as for iron-chests, in those days they shall be without end!"

He laughed, and his comrades laughed; but this resolve, so merrily avowed, was in reality formed seriously. He had, reckless as he was, sufficient superstition to dread the curse denoun-

ced upon him in the possession of the nabob's wealth; and the death of poor Dummie, the sacrifice of a singularly attached being, and in truth his own son, at the very moment, as it were, of his entering on an inheritance so bequeathed, gave yet greater force to his feelings.

While Sir Harbottle and his friends thus caroused, the bereaved mother and a few neighbours followed poor Dummie to the grave; and the vulgar public, with quick sense of right and wrong, and ever ready to censure their superiors in rank, spoke in no measured terms of the man who held a revel in his house the very day his son was buried.

Sir Harbottle, sincere in his desire to repair as far as money would do it, the loss and sorrows of Judith, sent down his man to desire an interview with her. The poor woman was busied putting by her son's clothes into the little chest whence they could never more be taken for his use.

"Tell your master," said she with tearless eyes, still smoothing the old coat her boy had worn, "that I shall not come at his bidding, nor shall I receive gold at his hands. I asked neither

help nor pity in my sorest need, and I ask them not now, and especially not from him. Tell him to keep his gold to be a curse to himself, and his pity, if pity he have, against the day when he may need it for himself. Tell him I have not another son of whom I can be bereaved; I am utterly desolate; and, though he drank his wine with the drunken while the poor dumb fool was buried, he may live to see the time when he may wish the heads of his own sons as low as is the head of mine! Tell him all this, young man, word for word, or bid him come down to me and hear it for himself!"

The lacquey turned on his heel, believing, as many had done, even before the boy's death, that the woman was mad. The purport of her message was delivered to the baronet; and though he laughed loudly, and swore with a desperate oath that she was ready for Bedlam, it only gave yet deeper energy to his resolve of counteracting the nabob's curse by beginning altogether a new life.

CHAPTER II.

To begin a new life, or, to use his own phrase, "to turn over a new leaf," in the most effectual way, would be, Sir Harbottle Grimstone knew, by taking to himself a wife. He accordingly looked round among the ladies of his own neighbourhood; but no one of them took his fancy. If he again thought of, or had still a lingering passion for Jane Ashenhurst, certain it is he did not again solicit her hand. How or where Sir Harbottle met with the wife he chose, is not for us to say; nor was it known to any of his friends, for great was the surprise of them all when it was given out that the baronet was about to bring home his lady, and to take her to Denborough Park, which would henceforward be his residence. Lady Grimstone made her appearance, without bridemaids, without any bridal attendant or ceremonial whatever; a calm, placid lady; young, but with the staid, sober demeanour of much more experienced years, and withal a Roman Catholic. Sir Harbottle's jovial friends were all thrown aback by the lady who thenceforth was to preside over the man-

sion; they foretold, at a glance, that all the jolly doings of the old hall at Knighton were at an end,—and they were right. The next thing that was heard of, was the dismissal of hunters and hounds: "A most prudent beginning!" said every one. The old hall was then let; its furniture sold; the park farmed to advantage; farms admeasured and relet on higher terms; supernumerary servants dismissed; borrowed money paid off, and everything put into a train of the greatest possible order and sober regularity.

Courteous reader, by your leave, we must now suppose seven-and-thirty years to pass before we again resume this true history; and so supposing, after this lapse of time we will again look in upon the once princely demesne of Denborough Park. The very turf of the park itself seemed to have undergone a change: the more distant parts were enclosed, and had already borne the harvests of many seasons; the luxurious herds of deer were gone, and in their stead cattle were grazing at so much a-head; the waters were some of them drained dry, and others overgrown with reeds and choked up with water-plants; all the oaks in the prime of their vigour were cut down,

and the unbroken sunlight fell upon many a hollow which for centuries before had lain in the shadowy umbrageousness of its woods. Here and there, on the boundaries where the wall had fallen down, or palings were broken, the breach was defended with the most economical substitutes for the original material. The heavy tree-branches hung low over the richly-wrought cast-iron gates which made of old the principal park-entrance; the massy and deeply-cut stone pillars on either hand were green and weather-stained; while the stone lions rampant with which they were surmounted were, the one hidden with the overgrowth of trees, and the other broken by some rude accident. Spiders, season after season, had spun their webs in the iron tracery of the lofty gates, and weeds and gravel encroached on their lower fretwork: all things showed that it was many a year since these gates had been opened. Advancing onward, by the very road by which Mrs. Ashenhurst and her daughter gained the house, the once marble-smooth gravel-walks, winding among lawns and shrubberies, were now green and overrun with a plentiful growth of weeds, which went

to seed and sprang up thicker each successive season. The lawns themselves, rank and untrimmed as the common field, encroached with their seeded grass both upon shrubbery and walks; the once cheerful fountains were now dry, and the marble basins into which they had played unsightly with rubbish or matted with weeds; the shrubberies were wild, overgrown thickets, that told of many years of neglect. Immediately round the house might still be seen some feeble attempts at cultivation; the grass was mown once in the year, the flower-borders and shrubberies roughly dug, and the branches of trees lopped, which would otherwise have impeded the freedom of walking. But the house itself told even a sadder tale of neglect than the surrounding grounds; the exterior had assumed that aspect of disorder and neglect which even the dry brick and mortar or stonework of a house so soon puts on: the wood-work was unpainted; the windows, many of them closed, and others, by their dingy, uncleaned appearance, spoke of discomfort and neglect within. Some, too, there were of the lower and more commonly used apartments, with crack-

ed panes puttied at the extremities; or, if quite broken out, mended with paper, or more effectually with a wooden substitute.

Let us enter and observe the inmates. But our entrance must not be by the splendid, temple-like portico at which Mrs. Ashenhurst and her daughter alighted,—it was many a year since that was in use; tall dandelions lifted up their globes of winged seed from the joints of the marble steps, and the carved door was bleached and weathered by the tempests of many seasons; the small, line-like crevice where the well-made doors folded together was filled with dust, and in the keyhole a spider had built its web. It was through a side-door leading to the less dignified apartments that entrance was now to be had. In all the rooms were yet to be seen abundant traces of the once regal plenishing; but everywhere the dominant spirit of sordid parsimony or of brutal misrule made itself felt; it was a degraded den of the most revolting features of the human character, ignorance and avarice. The superb appliances for luxurious enjoyment remained many of them in their tattered and tarnished grandeur, and others were

put to uses far different from their original destination.

The history of the gradual steps by which the master of the mansion, the once jovial and lavish Sir Harbottle Grimstone, had advanced from retrenchment to parsimony—from parsimony into avarice—avarice absorbing and insatiable, it is needless to trace; seven-and-thirty years had seen the nabob's curse operate deeply and fatally by the very means Sir Harbottle had used to counteract it: nor will we tell of the domestic strife and bickering, nor of the conjugal and maternal wretchedness, which had harassed and almost worn down the spirit of the much-enduring Lady Grimstone.

Their descendants were five: the three elder, sons, Christopher, George, and Robert, all grown to man's estate, with the rude ignorance of boys, and the determined undisciplined vices of men. Sir Harbottle had soon become too penurious to pay for his sons' education at school or college, and when they again returned to their home they had far outgrown the influence of their mother. Lady Grimstone from her own slender funds provided them for a while with pocket-money;

but when, as Sir Harbottle's parsimony grew, and she was obliged to provide for herself and her younger children whatever was beyond absolute necessaries, and as the passions and propensities of the elder strengthened, and their expenditure proportionably increased, she was unable longer to supply them, they filched and eked out their own finances by means which would not have borne too close an inquisition, and which made a perpetual warfare between their father and themselves. They were lawless at home, debauched abroad, and rapacious harpies everywhere, regarding their father as a stingy tyrant, and he the while looking on them as so many vampires ready to suck his blood and impatient for his death.

The daughter, Julia, had been entirely educated by her mother and the priest, Father Cradock, a poor but pious man, who circulated among the few Catholic families within three counties, and held at Denborough Park the three-fold character of priest, preceptor, and counsellor,—at least with Lady Grimstone and her two younger children. Julia, spite of the atmosphere of debased passion, of sordid and

miserable contention, of fearful example and evil communication, in which she had breathed from her infancy, had grown up like a lily among thorns. At the time we revisit Denborough Park she was in her twentieth year; a fair and blooming girl, with a roundness and fulness of figure, a bright and buoyant style of beauty, that contrasted sorrowfully with the worn, anxious, and shadow-like appearance of Lady Grimstone.

The youngest son, Bernard, was at this time eighteen, extremely unlike his sister or brothers; pale, and with an attenuation of frame and face that told somewhat of delicate health, but more of a quick, restless spirit, which excited and agitated within. No one could have looked on Bernard without thinking of the sword and its scabbard: his eye was dark and piercing, flashing with a troubled light, as much the evidence of strong passion as of keen intellect; his mind was grave and meditative; his nature, affectionate, and deeply sensitive, alive to the least sentiment of kindness, but quick also to resent slight or insult. Like his sister, he had profited to the utmost by what little instruction their pecu-

liar circumstances afforded them. He was the indefatigable pupil of Father Cradock while he remained at Denborough Park; but in his absence, wandered in unparticipated solitude about the brook-sides, or by the wild overgrown ponds in the park, with his angling-rod and his book, and often, instead of attending to either, sat absorbed for hours in visionary day-dreams, fostering still more an idealism of mind which must eventually unfit him to struggle with the common-place realities of the world, and leave him an easy prey to the designing, or the victim of certain disappointment. Both Lady Grimstone and Father Cradock designed him for holy orders,—nor had Bernard himself opposed his destination: for the present, however, he was essentially a poet—a poet, though he had essayed but little verse. He saw everything with a poet's eye, he felt it with a poet's heart, and within his soul lay those unfathomed wells of sentiments and deep moral feeling which are a vitality to true poetry; at the same time that his temperament was that of electric passion. Much of all this at present slept, but the elements were there ready to be kindled into being at a word.

Bernard Grimstone was a solitary enthusiast; neither his mother, his sister, nor Father Cradock himself knew as yet the susceptibility and depth of his feelings; yet to all of them he was extremely dear, and the source of much deep and almost painful interest. Of his son Bernard's existence Sir Harbottle Grimstone appeared to have no consciousness; the young man went in and out before him without attracting the least attention. His favourite son—in fact, his favourite child, spite of his continual offences, was Christopher, his first-born; his affection apparently decreased in seniority; the spirit of avarice, as it had grown, lessened and deadened his natural affections, till his younger children might be said to claim no paternal regard whatever. If the world censured Sir Harbottle, such censure either did not reach him, or if it did, he was too callous to be affected by it: besides, the interests of his property, and the strict guard he was compelled to keep over all to preserve it from the harpy clutches of his sons — like the dragon-watch of his own golden apples— occupied him so entirely that he had no time to mix in general society. True it is, he was in

the commission of the peace, and might be seen upon the bench and at quarter-sessions; but except there, Sir Harbottle could only be found walking with sturdy steps, dogged countenance, and watchful eye, that peered with quick glances from under his shaggy grey eyebrow, as if looking out for a depredator under every bush or behind every tree on some of his broad manors; or when at home, busied over his strong escritoir with his multiplied bonds and mortgages, leases and immense rent-roll; with the strong ring which held his keys over his left thumb, while his palm held fast the keys, from suspicion and experience of lawless hands which were ever ready to seize upon these keepers of his treasure.

Lady Grimstone, naturally a retiring and domestic woman, with strong affections and quiet good sense, had, as we have seen, not sought society even at her first coming to Denborough Park; now, how much more would she have avoided it had it been pressed upon her! For years she had been struggling to counteract the growing avarice of her husband and the profligate propensities of her elder children, and in acting as peacemaker between them and their father. Be-

sides this was another deep and anxious work of love, the education of her younger children, whose dispositions, naturally different, filled her with intense solicitude, from the consciousness of their fearfully dependant state when her declining health entirely failed her—a consummation she had looked forward to for years. Her sole counsellor in all her cares was the good Father Cradock: one friend, too, she had of her own sex, though subordinate to the priest. This lady, whose name was Constable, was the last and decayed remnant of a once proud, old Catholic line, and lived with her son at the small and ancient house of Westow, whose lands adjoined, or rather were entirely surrounded by those of Denborough—the last fragment of their once noble possessions, and one of the most insignificant jointure-houses in the flourishing days of the family, and whence Mrs. Constable visioned to herself that the family was again to take root and spring forth into fresh glory through the talents and influence of her only son.

Far differently educated was the poor Walter Constable to the rich sons of his mother's friend. Mrs. Constable had husbanded her son's income, and hoarded from her own private purse, denying

herself both indulgences and comforts, to obtain for her son the education of a gentleman. Father Cradock had been his early preceptor, and at fourteen, when he had acquired all that the humble priest could teach him, and far more than the roistering Grimstones had ever learned, he was sent to St. Omer's to complete his studies, and perfect himself in the arts of rising in the world—arts which his mother intended he should practice to the utmost. At three-and-twenty he returned to the old house at Westow, a profound scholar, an accomplished gentleman, the delight of his mother's heart and the glory of her eyes; active, enterprising, ambitious, with splendid connexions abroad and offers of patronage from the first Catholic families in England.

Many a time, in the fulness of her maternal pride, was the heart of Mrs. Constable filled with a generous compassion and sympathy for her friend, doomed as she was to humiliation and sorrowful anxiety about her children.

"Poor woman!" said the self-satisfied mother, "how thankful I am that my Walter never caused me a moment's uneasiness!" and then, while she saw in fancy the certain degradation and

misery of the young Grimstones and their heart-broken mother, she luxuriated in sunny visions of prosperity which her son would assuredly gather about her declining years.

But week after week, month after month went on of the summer after Walter's return, and, to his mother's astonishment, he seemed becoming indifferent about his future career; the at-first eagerly discussed plans of ambition occupied him no longer, and the letters of his most influential friends remained unanswered. She remonstrated, but his reply was an idle excuse. She then watched him narrowly; and the proud, intellectual Walter Constable might be seen angling in a beautiful brook that divided the lands of Denborough from those of Westow: she saw him carry out books of poetry which did not return with him; she saw him seated on the grass with Bernard Grimstone; and Bernard, the shy youth who had avoided her presence when she visited his mother, was now not an unfrequent guest at Westow. All this Mrs. Constable saw, but she suspected it was not all; and her suspicion was right: it was for the sake of Julia Grimstone that the ambitious man trifled away a summer among sunshine and green

leaves, for her sake that even more than a brother's interest warmed him towards her sensitive and ardent-spirited brother.

CHAPTER III.

A NEW existence opened upon Julia Grimstone from her intercourse with Walter Constable. Her mind, full of natural refinement and purity, had shrunk from the grossness and vulgarity of her elder brothers, and from the sordid, selfish spirit of her father, turning itself inward with an earnest, unsatisfied craving after companionship with gentler and nobler natures; for though a close bond of union existed between her mother and herself, Lady Grimstone, subdued by long suffering, yielded to, rather than resisted, the difficulties and annoyances of her lot, while Julia lived in a restless daily warfare with them. In Walter Constable all that she had visioned and desired, whether as friend, counsellor, or companion, was realized: his graceful person and the easy polish of his manners, the frank simplicity of his address, the lofty tone and purity of his sentiments, con-

trasting as they did with those of her hourly annoyance, were, in the first instance, irresistibly attractive; but when beyond this, on further acquaintance, she felt the force of a strong mind, opening before her new and extended views of all subjects of thought; when she heard him speak on topics, of which she had only dim conceptions, as familiar matters of every-day experience,—she looked upon him as a being of a superior order, come down, as it were, to irradiate the dark sphere of her mortal existence. To him this profound reverence of his intellect, which Julia in the simplicity and integrity of her heart took no pains to conceal, was flattering. The admiration of a beautiful woman finds its way to the heart of the deepest philosopher; and Walter, be it remembered, was young, fresh from the seclusion of a college, and with a heart peculiarly alive to the influence of beauty. No wonder was it, therefore, that the docile pupil who sat by his side, reading with him the same book, opening to him timidly the speculations and fancies of her own mind, and drinking in his deeper knowledge with an undisguised and reverential admiration, became more to him than the mere pupil of his school-learning.

But the exact manner in which the passion had directly revealed itself is not for us to say. At the very time we introduce the youthful pair to our readers, they were lovers, and in the daily habit of meeting; sometimes wandering together through the hollows or by the overgrown ponds of the park; or to some dingle, open moorland, or secluded ruin in the neighbourhood: and often the deep twilight shadows gloomed over the landscape, or the summer moon shone out, before they turned their faces homeward. But the more favourite place of meeting, and where many and many an hour was spent beside, was an old ruinous summer-house, which in the by-gone days of the Denborough Park glory had shone forth from the midst of its parterre and shrubbery on a wooded hill-side, with its painted windows, its gilt vane, and an internal decoration of marble and ornamental painting; but which now stood a picturesque, half-ruinous object; its garden overgrown with weeds and with but desolate remains of its shrubbery, in the midst of a growing plantation of younger trees,—the old generation of full-grown timber having been felled by Sir Harbottle when he came to the

estate. Doubtless the place was sacred to the lovers for something beyond its picturesque character, its sylvan site overtopped by the vigorous growth of its trees, or for the extensive view over many a county which the hill-top commanded at twenty yards' distance. Thither their steps, as if by instinct, were mostly directed, standing as it did most conveniently at the very point where the two neighbour lands met, and whence it commanded a view of the two homes—Denborough Park, yet magnificent in its desolation, showing at that distance perhaps even a more imposing aspect than in its grander days, like an old picture darkened and mellowed, though somewhat damaged, by time and neglect; and the ancient though small house of Westow, built of dark brick, with its balconied and turreted porch rising like a low tower over the roof; its old arched gateway and its double avenue of venerable elms—the only timber of which its fallen fortunes could now boast, and upon which its possessors looked with pride and respect almost equal to their family quarterings, or the achievements of their renowned ancestor John Constable, by whom these trees were planted.

Week after week, week after week went on of summer weather, and the blades of corn which the lovers had seen shoot from the ground were in ear, and the leaves which they had seen bud were now darkened into the monotonous green of the full-blown summer. Walter to all appearance had forgotten the schemes of busy life, in which but shortly before he had been so impatient to engage, and Julia's home-griefs and vexations had lost half their power of disturbing.

Blissful were those days of first, unclouded, unreflecting love, when all happiness—all existence even, seemed concentred in its consciousness.

The intercourse with this accomplished neighbour was not less delighful and beneficial to Bernard Grimstone than to his sister. Walter was of that order of spirits, which, full of mind itself, enkindles and calls forth the mind of those about it. Never did Bernard feel himself so overflowing with bright imaginings, so conscious of his own intellectual power, or so much to revere and yearn after intellectual beauty, as when out in the open air reclining on the turf, or walking with him and Julia, linked arm in arm, he listened to, or conversed with, Walter Consta-

ble. At first, it is true, he had been cast back, overpowered and dazzled, as it were, by the exhaustless and varied stores of his mind—for in learning poor Bernard felt as a little child before him; but when his friend, who understood his character at once, and the peculiar tendencies and gifts of his mind, brought out and showed him wherein his own strength lay, commending and encouraging his genius, a new and brighter future seemed to open before him, easy of access and certain in its reward; at the same time an eternal weight of gratitude seemed laid upon him, and in the overflowings of his heart he made Walter the confidant of many a hope, many a day-dream, many an ardent aspiring which he had believed but a few short hours before were as the sacred treasures of a holy place, not to be revealed to eye of man.

All this opening of the heart, this new sunshine of life, occasioned a closer and more intimate union between Bernard and his sister, and warmly and deeply did she sympathise in all those feelings which had hitherto been locked up in his own breast with such jealous care. Besides, Julia, with less critical taste and knowledge

than their friend, was more easily pleased, and a more generally encouraging recipient of his poetical flights and fancies; and praise is the breath of the poet's life. Dear was the praise thus given; and Julia, the beloved, the chosen of Walter Constable, ranked next, for judgment and knowledge, in the eyes of the young poet, to Walter himself, and sometimes even above him; for Julia would be enraptured by the sentiment of a stanza, while the wiser and sterner critic would demur about the rhythm of a line or the propriety of a new phrase.

Such was the state of affairs when Mrs. Constable, who had looked on with jealous eyes for some time, and forborne to reproach or reason with her son, only from the hope that it was but a passing friendship which would die all the sooner if unopposed, began to think her silence wrong; and especially, as in confirmation of her own suspicion, a rumour had reached her of the love between her son and Julia Grimstone, at which her informant had arched her brows and looked willing to wonder and talk if the lady had given encouragement, which, however, she did not, being perfectly satisfied with the hint. But

when Bernard came next to Westow she determined to sit in company with them, and even endure those poetical rhapsodies and reveries with which she had no sympathies, and then take the opportunity afterwards of representing to her son the folly and imprudence of such acquaintance, and still more of any closer connexion with the family. Accordingly, no sooner was the resolve made than an opportunity occurred of acting upon it. Bernard came to visit her son that very evening; and though she saw the restraint which her presence imposed on him, and the distress visible on his countenance as Walter commenced the customary topics, still she sat by in silent irritation, pursuing with redoubled speed her knitting—work in which she was everlastingly engaged, having already knit, during the nine years of her son's absence, hangings to a bed; chair and sofa covers, and, above all, a rug some four yards square of worsteds, curiously and elaborately emblazoning forth the arms of the Constables, with all their quarterings, in colours proper—gules, or, azure, and argent, in which lions pawed the air, and armed arms displayed their daggers; and though the four-footed creatures and the weapon-

ed gauntlets did not materially differ from each other in form, whatever they might in colour, and required verbally setting forth, still it was a grand piece of work, and fringed as it was with scarlet and purple, made no inconsiderable show in the centre of the old black and polished oak floor of their sitting-room, where it was laid down in especial honour of her son, to be consigned again to lock and key the very day on which he left Westow—the dark wainscoted walls of the same apartment displaying divers renowned ancestors of the family grim and faded in their dull gilded frames; among whom was the gallant John Constable, with his well-used sword; and Blanche, the lady of his second son, conspicuous for her angelic beauty through the dimmed colours of the canvass.—But to return to Mrs. Constable, who sat busied and troubled in this apartment. Her present work was now a counterpane, in which she exhibited endless imaginings of pattern, in every diversity of diced, diamonded, starred, waved, and scrolled pattern—a very paradise of dainty devices, and which she intended as a wedding present to her son's wife, when, after having achieved greatness, or won the heart of

some noble lady, the family tree, like the banyan, again shot root, to become even greater than the parent stock. For such a time this exquisite piece of work was now preparing, and it is possible that the good lady felt somewhat jealous that all this labour and pains, designed for some highly-dowered and nobly-allied bride, might, after all, be bestowed on a Grimstone; although Lady Grimstone was her friend, and the daughter, by her own confession, an excellent young woman; but then, there was the family! So thought Mrs. Constable, as she knit, stitch after stitch, and the point of the great diamond grew wider and wider, enclosing within itself a succession of yet smaller diamonds, and then again decreased to the opposite point. So thought she, always ending with an exclamation against the awful disgrace of marrying into the Grimstone family! How many diamonds were ruined while she fretted and listened to what seemed to her the solemn folly and high-flown nonsense of the two young men, it is impossible to say;—she knit and drew out the needles, and began again, and yet the thing went wrong; while Walter, in his rich and finely modulated voice,

read the verses which Bernard timidly presented before him, feeling self-persuaded that they were excellent, till they were in the critic's hand,—and then, with a sudden revulsion, believing them as wretched, while his eye glanced over them in silence, but again reassured and filled with a glowing enthusiasm as Walter without comment read aloud.

Away, vain power of Song! why make the gift
Of thy enchantments torture? Are there not
Thousands who down time's smoothest waters drift,
And curse the o'erflowing fulness of their lot;
Flying from scheme to scheme, from spot to spot,
In emptiness of soul? There launch the fire
Of thy quick lightnings, let the dreary blot
And blankness of their bosoms feel desire,—
Why should my care-bound heart be tempted to aspire?

O what a mighty and resplendent world
Lies there around! Yet what avails it me?
Like a sea-reptile in its shell upcurl'd,
Whelm'd in the waves, half-consciously, I see.
Abroad, abroad all natures wander free;
The waters leap in gladness; wild winds sing
On their far journeys; through the forest-tree
The fleet birds glance with joy-uplifted wing,—
Freedom, and light and bliss, visit earth's smallest thing!

The shepherd ranges the lone mountain proud;
Blithely his furrow the poor ploughman sows;
In wood and dell the labourer carols loud,
As on his cheek the free wind freshly blows;

Wildering delight the lowliest wanderer knows,
For round him peace and beauty are dispersed:
But me alone thy necromantic shows,
Beset in crowds—with sudden light they burst,
And mock my heart with dreams, and madden it with thirst.

O for a glimpse of Ocean! the wild roar—
The fluttering breeze, like breath of distant lands;
The waves' glad riot on the rocky shore;
The calm blue stretch of far-reposing strands!
Oh! the fair scene where livingly expands
The waste of waters that, with heave and bound,
Rejoice in their sublimity—the sands
Where the wild sea-flocks piping blithe are found,
Or send their lonely cries, blent with the billows' sound!

Stand not the lonely hills as they have stood
Through solitary ages? There the cloud
From far-lands sailing, loves to pause and brood:
There haunts the wind; and there the torrent loud
Shouts in its joy; the eagle circles proud;
There crouches the red stag; there roams the flock:
Why, why am I, as they, not thus allow'd
To climb their lonely ridges, and unlock
Thought's solitary flow, like waters from the rock?

I pine for those wild slopes and glooms—I yearn
To feel the free winds of the heath; to slake
My thirst at waters that through moss and fern
Run sparkling to the forest-skirted lake;
Through morning dews and odorous dells to take
My joyous way, to where the northern seas,
'Mid screaming wild-fowl, ever-sounding break
Round isles which know no shade of summer-trees,
But 'mid the misty crags green lie the silent leas.

My soul is haunted with the sights and sounds
Of the vast world; I hear, I hear the roar
Of the great ocean, whose delight surrounds
The glorious earth and rushes evermore
With an immortal strength on every shore!
Rapt o'er its waters, on the spirit's wing,
What palmy lands my fancy doth explore,—
What sea-like floods, and forests tall that fling
Their spicy branches wide o'er no familiar thing!

So dost thou, Soul of Poetry, at will
Catch up and whirl me to all climes remote;
Through storm and darkness—through the arctic chill,
Like an unbodied essence do I float;
War's wasting myriads, drum and trumpet note,
And merchant-caravan, and city-show;
Here fleets, and there the famine-haunted boat,
Driven far, the terrors of the sea to know:
Man's pride and misery all, before me come and go!

I wake, and what am I? With closed eyes,
As the chain'd captive in the galley's hold,
Dreams of free-footed wilds and cloudless skies
Till the chain pinches, and his fate is roll'd
Back on his bosom—so to thirst and cold
And darkness do I wake! These visions fair
Pass, and life's most unspiritual things unfold,—
Things which I would not—hopes I scorn to share—
And souls—can *they* be souls!—those drudges of low care!

"This, my friend, is in the true spirit of your art," said Walter as he gave back the paper; "and the versification is as good as the sentiment:

your images are not incongruous either. It is a noble poem, Bernard!"

The tears started to the poet's eye, and his pale cheek was yet paler, as he received the verses back, and heard the few words of commendation. Much talk of poetry ensued, and poor Mrs. Constable knit yet faster than ever, and wondered her son had no more sense. No sooner was the young guest gone than she began:—

"I think, Walter Constable, you might find something better to do than to fill that young man's head with such high-flown and sentimental nonsense! What good can all this verse-making and rhodomontading do for either of you?—can it alter the Grimstone reputation, or stand Mr. Bernard in the stead of a decent education?—or can it, I pray you, in your own case, answer those letters which have needed your attention these so many weeks!"

"He is a fine fellow!" was Walter's irrelevant reply. "What a fine intellectual head—what a keen yet tenderly expressive eye! I have never seen *the poet* so beautifully marked in countenance and in mind as in this young man."

"And what good, I should like to know, can

all this do for him, cursed as he is with his Grimstone connexions?" asked Mrs. Constable.

"Do for him?" repeated Walter. "It will raise him high enough above his connexions! The highest men in the land will be proud to connect themselves with him, if his future years fulfil the promise of his youth!"

"And I suppose, son Walter, you desire to connect yourself with his family, in anticipation of all this wonderful greatness!" said she sarcastically.

The colour mounted to Walter's brow, self-collected and full of self-command as he commonly was.

"It is a cruel disappointment to me," continued she, "that you should thus waste your time and neglect your interests for the sake of the first fair face that comes in your way."

Walter looked displeased, but he still made no reply, and his mother again went on.

"Your education — an education worthy of an earl's son, has cost me many privations and much painful economy; but I regret it not—I would make even greater sacrifices for you! But now that you should neglect your natural advan-

tages, and offend and neglect friends willing and able to serve you, and all for the daughter of a miserable wretch like Sir Harbottle Grimstone; the sister too of those profligates with whom any connexion would be like having the plague itself, is ingratitude to me—and for yourself, nothing short of absolute folly!"

"Miss Grimstone," returned Walter quickly, "is guiltless of the crimes of her family; and the man who united himself to her would insure his domestic happiness."

"And pray, sir," replied Mrs. Constable, "what have you to do with domestic happiness for the present, further than you may occasionally find at this fireside at Westow? A public life, with its rich reward of wealth and honour, is what you must follow: for this your education has fitted you—and your talents, Walter, also, in an eminent manner, unless you abuse them over rhapsodical nonsense!"

"Which life would produce the greater sum of happiness," replied Walter, "I think hardly admits of a doubt."

"What!" exclaimed his mother, losing her patience, "will you indeed throw away those

already splendid offers which solicit your notice, as if you conferred the honour by accepting, not your friends by bestowing?—will you throw away the patronage of the Marquis of A——? —and all forsooth because Christopher Grimstone's sister has bright eyes and raven hair! Son Walter, I might have neglected you, as these your friends have been neglected—I might have lived in bodily comfort, and as my station required—and yet you have been quite good enough to have matched with a Grimstone! Little did I think, while I condescended to economy which almost verged on parsimony,—though, I thank God, it was not to lay up under lock and key like your friend Sir Harbottle,—I little thought, son Walter, for what a poor reward it was done!"

Walter sat with his arms folded and his eyes fixed on his mother's face, but without replying; and Mrs. Constable, drawing out her needles in her energy, continued—

"It is the extreme of folly thus to have entangled yourself! What business had you to engage the affections of Julia Grimstone?"

"I am master of my own actions!" retorted he,

stung by his mother's words; "I have arrived at years of discretion!"

"Years of consummate folly, say rather!" replied the disturbed lady. "You that have no means of supporting yourself must yet encumber yourself with a wife and family!"

"You are over-hasty, Mrs. Constable!" said her son: "marriage for the present is out of the question. I hope before then to achieve some of the grateness of which you have had such bright visions!"

"An impossibility—a pure impossibility!" exclaimed his mother. "No sooner will Lady Grimstone be dead—and her life is already as a lamp without oil—than Miss Julia must look out for a new home. Good God! what a dependant state she will be in! and who must provide for her? Why, yourself, Walter Constable! This young man too, whom you puff up with such empty and extravagant hopes, how, I pray you, can he contend with the gross natures to whom he will be subject?—you must provide for him also! You ought to have had a fortune rather in possession than one to make, with these dependants whom you have taken to yourself!"

Mrs. Constable had given a most impressive view to the subject, and Walter fell into deep thought.

"You are right," at length he said; "I have too long neglected my friends; the letters you speak of shall be attended to this day. I have deeply involved myself in responsible duties."

Walter sat down to address his honourable and his right honourable friends, and to declare his readiness to embrace whatever offers of employment, at home or abroad, they might propose to him. Mrs. Constable, in the mean time, re-arranged her knitting.

The letters finished, Walter laid them before his mother, for whose judgment he had the profoundest respect.

"Thank you, my son," said she, when she had gone through them: "you have now done your duty to yourself, and to me also; for, Heaven knows, you owe no duty to the one in which the other is not intimately connected."

"Let us not misunderstand each other," said Walter, taking a seat beside her. "These letters, nor even my going abroad, do not abrogate my engagement with Miss Grimstone: whenever I

am in a condition, as regards worldly prosperity, to marry, I am bound to her."

"I can but think it a precipitous step," said his mother, "and a most unadvised one: you had done far better to have kept free of any such engagements for the present, but most of all with this family!"

"On the contrary," said Walter, "I esteem myself most fortunate to have secured such a wife, and such a daughter for you!" said he, taking her hand, and smiling in her face affectionately. "The long winter evenings, of which you made such pathetic complaints in my absence, would be short with a companion like Julia;—Julia, whom you have styled a sweet, lively, affectionate girl; of whom, too, you sent me such pretty pictures of filial duty and meekness and forbearance while I was abroad. You may thank yourself, dear lady," said Walter, laughing, "for my entanglement, as you call it: you had already bespoken my love for her!"

Mrs. Constable smiled. "No, no, I have nothing to say against her; she has, to be sure, been an excellent daughter; nor can I object one word against this young poetical friend of yours,

nor their poor mother; but still it will require some time to reconcile me to the thought of your marrying a Grimstone!"

"You are an excellent, reasonable woman," returned Walter, "and I do not doubt your being perfectly contented with it."

So concluded this conversation, which, on Mrs. Constable's part, was begun with the design of ending the connexion with the Grimstones.

CHAPTER IV.

In the foregoing conversation, Mrs. Constable had said two things which were very true: that it would take a long time to reconcile her to her son's marriage with a Grimstone; and that the life of Lady Grimstone was but as a lamp in which the oil is exhausted.

The first truth impressed itself again on her mind within the first hour after the apparent acquiescence she had been, in a manner, decoyed into by the concession of her son; and, thenceforth daily, nay hourly, were her struggles with her-

self to see this connexion other than foolish and impolitic, though she forbore to renew the subject.

The second truth, together with the consequences she had foreseen, at Walter's very next visit to Denborough Park, revealed itself as if to verify his mother's words.

Lady Grimstone sat in her large easy-chair at the open window, to enjoy the sunshine, and the warm, fresh, and yet odorous air of the garden, into which she was now no longer able to walk. Julia was absent from the room; and while Walter stood by her chair, apparently observing the long, lithe sprays of a jasmine, starred over with flowers, which the breeze was lightly wavering to and fro, he saw of a certainty that the head which had so long been bowed with suffering and sorrow would shortly neither know the one nor the other. In the pale and hollow countenance, Death had already done half his work; and Walter wondered how, hitherto, he had been so unobservant of this decay of life. A sentiment of the most profound sympathy and affection filled his heart; and wishing to amuse her by passing conversation, he pointed out the whitening of the corn upon the

opposite slope, of what had once been park, but was now converted into tillage-fields, and which might be seen through an opening in the shrubbery.

"I see it," returned the sick lady: "it will soon be ready for the reaper; and, my friend, by the time that corn stands in shock, I shall be carried to the grave!"

"My dear lady!" began Walter, distressed at the application she had made of his words.

"Yes, my friend," she continued, "it will be so! I, like that very field, am ripening for the harvest, and shall be carried to my last home before it is carried to the garner: my time therefore is short; then let me speak now what is so deeply on my mind!"

She raised herself in her chair, and Walter, impressed by the solemnity of her manner, seated himself beside her in silence.

"May the Almighty Father and Preserver bless you for your kindness to my daughter and my son Bernard!" said she, laying her thin, pallid hand upon his arm. "I know, Mr. Constable, the disgrace, the infamy—I speak plainly what I yet shudder to acknowledge—the in-

famy of a connexion with this house! And you, with your virtues — with your talents and your prospects in life, might look forward to an alliance of honour! May the Almighty therefore bless you, that you have condescended to us!"

Walter endeavoured to interrupt her; but she motioned him to silence with her feeble, attenuated hand, and continued:—

"I know the extent of our obligation to you, —I know the nobility of your heart, Mr. Constable, and it wounds me to the soul to think of the sacrifice you must make for our sakes: but, my friend, my whole life has been one of humiliation and self-denial; I have loved deeply, but have either received coldness and neglect in return, or have found myself, as now, unable to pour out on those I loved the essential and available blessing which they deserved and I coveted for them! I leave my Bernard and Julia to your care! God bless you with them! God Almighty, in whose keeping are the hearts of all men, open the heart which is now shut and incline it towards them—touch the hearts which are now hardened, and turn them from sin, that they may no longer be a disgrace to

the guiltless, and as a stumbling-block in their way!"

"Amen!" said the low voice of Father Cradock, who had stolen in unperceived and now joined them.

"Have I done well, Father Cradock?" asked Lady Grimstone.

"Yes, my daughter," answered he; and then turning to Walter, "Will you do these things?" inquired he.

"To the best of my poor ability, and so help me every good saint!" exclaimed Walter fervently, taking from his breast at the same time a small crucifix which he pressed to his lips.

"May the Father of Mercies and the Mother of our dear Lord bless you for the kindness which you have already shown to us, and for the kindness which is in your heart to show!" ejaculated Lady Grimstone in a trembling but earnest voice.

"Amen!" repeated Father Cradock.

Lady Grimstone sank back in her chair, apparently exhausted.

"Leave me, my dear friend," said she at length, turning to Walter: "I am much spent, and the good father will remain with me."

Without seeking for an interview either with Julia or her brother, Walter left Denborough Park with a deep sense of the serious duties laid upon him, and with an earnest prayer in his heart to be enabled to the utmost to perform whatever those duties required.

The days went on, and Mrs. Constable's knitting many a time went wrong as she thought of this unwelcome connexion with even more than her wonted disapprobation, hearing now, as she did, almost daily of the declining health of the lady of Denborough Park, and watching with the closest scrutiny the grave and anxious countenance of her son, who seemed never to have regained his former buoyant-heartedness since the day of that conversation which we have recorded.

The lovers met not less frequently than formerly; but their meetings were short, and darkened by natural sorrow—no longer in the freedom of the ruined summer-house, or for half a day's ramble many a mile from home,—but for the few minutes which Julia stole from attendance in her mother's chamber, spent in the wilderness of garden or shrubbery, or perhaps for a longer time in the stillness and shaded light of the sick-room;

mournful meetings, but meetings full of even more than ordinary heart-union.

Within two weeks after Walter had written to his noble friends, he received an answer from the Marquis of A——. The letter was the most gracious that patron ever penned. It expressed the entire pleasure which Walter's application had given him,—and still greater, as at that very moment he could offer him employment which, he believed, would meet with his entire approbation. What it was, however, was not stated; but the patron went on to hint of the highest trust being reposed in him, of great emolument and honour, and proceeded to say that he should be at his country seat in a few weeks, where he hoped Mr. Constable would join him, ready to enter upon his post immediately, supposing that the proposed employment accorded with his own views and wishes when it was made known to him. Beyond all this, the writer inquired in a postscript whether, among the clever and trustworthy young men of his acquaintance, Mr. Constable could recommend one who could act as private secretary to a nobleman, and perhaps ac-

company his son abroad, less as a tutor than as a travelling companion?

Nothing could have been more entirely to Walter's satisfaction than this letter, promising not only himself honourable and lucrative employment, but enabling him at the same time to provide for his young friend.

Mrs. Constable herself was warmed into self-forgetting and generous enthusiasm on the occasion.

"Poor Lady Grimstone," said she, "this will make her death-bed happy; and, to be sure, Mr. Bernard is a well-conducted young man; and if the whole family had been like him, there had been pleasure in knowing them!"

Walter took the letter with him, and hastened to Denborough Park, passing in his way through the very corn-field to which Lady Grimstone had given so ominous a character. The ears were heavy and ripe, and, spite of the good tidings he bore with him, his mind dwelt with sad meditation on the words of the dying lady. "What," thought he, as he entered the house and advanced along the well-known passages without encounter-

ing a single domestic, "if she be even now dead!"

He passed Sir Harbottle's room, and opened the door softly to gather even there some knowledge of what he almost dreaded to know. Sir Harbottle, as usual, was sitting before his escritoir busied among his papers.

"Body o' me!" exclaimed he, huddling his papers together, closing the escritoir suddenly, and grasping the keys in his hand as they hung in the lock. "Body o' me! Christie, lad! George! Bob! away with ye!—Oh! Mr. Constable, is it you?" added he in a softer tone as he faced round to the intruder.

"How is Lady Grimstone?" asked Walter, somewhat assured by the baronet's manner.

"I can't say, sir,—I don't exactly know, sir!" replied Sir Harbottle in the hurried voice of a thief guarding his booty, dropping at the same time the heavy bunch of keys which he had disengaged into his capacious pocket; "I really cannot say, sir; but you 'll find somebody in her room."

Walter retreated from the miser's den, which he had never before entered, scarcely knowing whe-

ther he might understand evil or good from his words: and no sooner had he left the door, than he heard the lock turned and the bolts drawn, as if to intimate to him how unwelcome his intrusion had been, or to secure himself against similar incursions.

Walter paused at the door of Lady Grimstone's apartment. The sweet, cheerful voice of Julia reached him outside as she sang, Bernard the while accompanying her with the low tones of his flute. There was the most delicious assurance in these sounds; and Walter, unwilling to interrupt them, listened to the words which Julia sang.

Father, we praise thee,
Father we bless thee!
Yet how can we raise thee
  Such hymns as thou needest!
Poor are we and lowly,
Thou, mighty and holy!
All Heaven thy throne is;—
Yet each heart to thee known is,
  And its sorrow thou heedest!
Its sorrow most secret,
  Thou knowest and heedest!
Father we bless thee,
We praise, we revere thee!
For the groans of our feebleness
Ever come near thee!

When the hymn was concluded he entered. Lady Grimstone, looking unusually cheerful, sat in her chair by the window, through which the setting sun streamed with a golden radiance, warming into a ruby glow the crimson damask curtains, which were only partly put back. At her feet sat Julia, on a low seat, more animated and beautiful than common, looking upward to her mother's face, the rich light seeming to irradiate her whole figure. Bernard stood a little apart from them, with an open book in his hand, from which he was selecting another hymn.

Nothing could have been more beautiful than this group which, as Walter opened the door, presented itself before him, — a group which expressed so exquisitely maternal and filial affection. What a striking contrast to the sordid-spirited Sir Harbottle, terrified over his money-bags, and suspecting a thief in broad daylight, and that too in the person of one of his sons! What a delightful contradiction too of all his fears! The next moment Walter was among them. He congratulated Lady Grimstone on her improved looks; he impressed an ardent kiss on Julia's rosy and

smiling mouth, and shook Bernard so resolutely by the hand as to make him drop the book, scattering abroad from between its opening pages many a scrawled and blotted manuscript.

"I will lay you the worth of that book, though it were a Wynkin de Worde itself, that I can match any of those lucubrations in value—nay, exceed them, by a manuscript I have at this moment in my hand, though the caligraphy is none of the rarest!"

"Let us see," said Bernard, "for among these are some of your own exquisite scholarship."

Walter explained the contents of the letter, and dwelt particularly on that part which he intended should refer to Bernard.

"Give me your hand!" said Lady Grimstone when he had finished; "you are the friend I believed you! I shall die in peace,—my prayers have been answered, my children will be provided for!"

All that was said, all that was planned at that happy time, need not be told; everything, like the light of the chamber, seemed rose-coloured. With the most entire union of heart, and full of confidence in the flattering future, they talked on,

till the sudden gathering gloom of the chamber attracted their notice.

"Alas!" said Lady Grimstone, with a voice that sounded sad, as a prophecy of woe, "these are clouds which have darkened the sunset! Heaven grant that this be not a warning for us! To-day we are full of confidence and joy,—what may not happen on the morrow!"

The young people all thought she spoke of her own probable death, and elated as they had been, their spirits were saddened by her ominous words.

CHAPTER V.

WALTER replied to the marquis's letter, accepting with confidence whatever employment his noble patron had in prospect for him; recommending, at the same time, his young friend with the most unhesitating zeal.

The next and most important step to be taken, was the obtaining from Sir Harbottle Grimstone a sufficient sum of money, to enable Bernard to begin his career with the outward appearance of a gentleman, and that he might not

be penniless till he received the reward of his own labours. Three hundred pounds was the sum which was thought necessary,—very little to begin the world with, and yet as much as it was dared to demand from the bags of Sir Harbottle.

Bernard had hitherto been scarcely chargeable to his father; and while, at one moment, the domestic conclave, to which Walter Constable was admitted, flattered themselves this might be a plea on which to advance their claim, at another they feared, and not without reason, that Sir Harbottle would never yield to so unaccustomed a demand. The affair, however, did not admit of delay, and Walter was commissioned to urge the subject with the baronet, after his lady had found her most urgent prayers unavailing.

Accordingly, a few mornings afterwards, Walter again presented himself at the door of Sir Harbottle's room. It was that very apartment which in former years had been the private room of the nabob, opening into his chamber, and which also, as by a strange fatality, was Sir Harbottle's own. This room, light and splendid as it had been in the days of its first possessor, was now dingy and sombre. One window only was ever opened,

the shutters of the others being closed with their heavy iron bars; what remained of the damask hangings was heavy with dust; cobwebs hung in long waving lines from the ceiling, or festooned the rich cornice, which was deeply shadowed by its long-accumulated dust; the thick, rich carpet, in many parts entirely unworn, was trodden even into holes in the particular parts where the heavy feet of Sir Harbottle Grimstone had been for so long, almost mechanically, set down as it were to an inch. Some of the furniture must have been removed, for there was an air of vacancy in the room: one chair only beside the one he himself used by the fire—the identical chair in which the nabob had reclined, stood by the wall, as if to intimate that the miser did not receive guests; one other also there was, which he used at his escritoir—a leather-covered armed-chair, with a remarkably low back, suggesting the idea that it was used not for comfort truly, but to enable him to see behind without impediment in case intruders entered: it was an incongruous piece of furniture, and one which the refined taste of the nabob could never have selected,—it had been brought probably from Sir Har-

bottle's old house at Knighton. A richly wrought table of curious Indian wood stood in the centre of the room, as it had stood in the days of General Dubois; and upon it, in place of the superb Persian cloth with which it had formerly been covered, was thrown a piece of faded yellow damask, which had been torn from the hangings. In the untrimmed and unpolished stove remained the untidy ashes of the last season's fires,—Sir Harbottle never admitting a domestic within his door excepting on the most indispensable occasions; hence it was that the room had never been swept or otherwise cleaned for many years. The escritoir, a grand piece of cabinet-work, and on many accounts the most remarkable piece of furniture in the room, had been placed where it stood by the former possessor; and, rumour said, contained among the accumulated parchments and papers, and swelling money-bags of Sir Harbottle Grimstone, many a manuscript of the nabob's own writing, which it had been worth anything to the romance-writer or the chronicler of the human heart to have read; but their author could not have guarded them with more inviolate care than did his successor,—none but

Sir Harbottle ever knew if such things there were.

Such was the room into which Walter entered, not for the first time, it is true, but which now for the first time he leisurely examined. He found Sir Harbottle sitting in the large armed chair opposite the door. He was a large-made, heavy, though not corpulent man, in a well-worn snuff-coloured suit, without wig or powder, extremely bald and grey, with a shaggy eyebrow almost entirely concealing the small, deeply-set grey eye, cold, and apparently passionless. The whole expression of his face was in unison,—a dogged, hard character of countenance, totally without sentiment, and appearing incapable of emotion. He was sitting upright in his chair,—his legs set firmly on the ground—feet together, but knees apart—the bunch of keys in the closed palm of his left hand, the iron ring as usual over his thumb, and in his right he held a small parchment-deed, upon which he was poring through his old steel spectacles. He glanced off the parchment at Walter's entrance, but, without returning his salutation, again employed himself as before. The purport of his visit he knew,

and thought within himself he would make him wait.

Walter drew the one chair from the wall, and sat down, intending to arrest his attention when he had gone through the parchment, which, on account of its small size, could not occupy him long: but Sir Harbottle might have been spelling it through letter by letter, so slow was his progress; and Walter in a while began to suspect that his intention was to tire him out, especially as he saw a latent smile about his cold mouth, which he had occasionally remarked on former occasions, and knew intimated malice rather than good-will.

"I hope, Sir Harbottle," he therefore began, without ceremony, "you have decided on advancing this money for your son Bernard?"

Sir Harbottle appeared to read on without seeming to hear.

"Nothing could be more advantageous to your son than this post, which may so readily be obtained for him, but which yet requires an outfit."

It seemed like striking a rock with a feather to talk to Sir Harbottle.

"Your son Bernard," continued Walter, "is

an excellent young man, with talents most unquestionably of a fine order. You must not stand in the way of his fortune, Sir Harbottle."

The baronet might have been deaf and dumb, for any visible impression which the words made upon him; and Walter, almost out of patience, determined to assail what was more penetrable than his senses—his love of money.

"If, Sir Harbottle," said Walter, "you will not advance this sum, it must be taken up in your name."

Sir Harbottle laid down the deed and took off his spectacles at once.

"There are two things," said he, "Mr. Walter Constable, which I should like to be informed upon—why you intermeddle with my affairs; and why I am to do all this for Bernard?"

"Simply, sir, because Mr. Bernard is a noble-minded and most excellent young man. The last few months have made me intimately acquainted with him; and an opportunity now presents of his acquiring both fortune and reputation."

"Let him acquire them then, sir!" was Sir Harbottle's reply.

"Sir Harbottle," continued Walter, "you

have known something of life; you know that a young man cannot enter it, and especially move in an elevated sphere, without money: a few hundreds therefore it will be necessary that you advance for him."

"It will save time and breath, Mr. Walter," said Sir Harbottle, "for you to know at once that I am not intending to advance him any money!"

"I cannot allow you to decide so hastily, Sir Harbottle!"

"As you please," said the baronet with the most rigid apathy.

"It is not possible that you would ruin his prospects in life thus wantonly, Sir Harbottle!" exclaimed Walter with rather an unphilosophical warmth of temper,—"and that for the sake of a few paltry hundred!"

"Oh, sir, if you think money so paltry," returned the baronet, "why I presume you have plenty. I can have no objection to your advancing him the money—a man is perfectly at liberty to do what he likes with his own," said he, again taking up the parchment.

"My good sir," replied Constable, "I cannot

do it—I wish I could!—but money is not as plentiful at Westow as at Denborough Park!"

"You take tolerable liberties for a man of your years, Mr. Constable," returned the baronet. "If I had wanted your advice, sir, I doubt not but I could have sent for you!"

"Sir Harbottle," said Walter, "I am not come to affront you; but to beseech you, on behalf of one of the most deserving and highly-gifted young men,—on behalf of one whom you may be proud to esteem your son——"

"Wheuh! wheuh!" whistled Sir Harbottle contemptuously.

"—To beseech from you, Sir Harbottle, a small sum which is as nothing from your abundance—which you will never miss, but which will ensure your son's fortune and happiness!"

"I have already told you," returned he, "that I am not going to advance him any money!"

"Consider, Sir Harbottle, what you are doing! Every child has a natural claim upon its parents for the very best assistance they can give! You are bound by the most sacred bond before both God and man to provide for your children!"

"Why, I might be one of the most godless

wretches under the sun, and you one of the most profound of teachers!" said Sir Harbottle, in wrath. "Pray, sir, in what respect have I neglected my duty to this son of mine, or to any of my sons? Did I not send those three scapegraces to school and college, and a pretty sum it cost me! and what were they the better for it? Am I not cheated by them, and robbed by them, and, for aught I know, shall have my throat cut by them! They are the very plagues of my life! And yet you come here upbraiding me because I will not throw my money away to them by handfuls!"

"It is not for these your sons, Sir Harbottle, that I am soliciting your assistance, but for your son Bernard."

"Bernard!" retorted Sir Harbottle with contempt, as if the idea were perfectly new to him; "a mere stripling! what can he want with money? —a child that has never been away from his mother's apron-strings, and knows nothing of the world, what can he do with money? Why, you might as well give it to sharpers at once! Bernard, i' faith, that knows nothing either of men or manners! If you had asked it for Christie,

there might have been some sense in it; for he would have his pennyworth, though it were of folly—never fear him! But Bernard! 'tis absurd!"

"Allow me to tell you, Sir Harbottle, that you have very little knowledge of your son Bernard."

"Very well, sir, I must have more then before I shall trust him with even three pounds, much less as many hundreds! And so, sir, I beg you will drop the subject."

"No, Sir Harbottle," continued Walter, "I cannot let you thus lay up repentance for yourself! How can you answer it to God that you have neglected to provide in the best possible manner for your children—for this son at least! What have you done for Bernard—in what way have you advanced his fortunes? Give him, sir, a sum equal to what you expended on his brothers for their education! Bernard has hitherto cost you but little!"

"Spare your breath for a better purpose, Mr. Constable," said Sir Harbottle; "I have already told you my determination."

"Will you send him penniless into the world?"

"He has a home here," replied Sir Harbottle, —"a good roof over his head, and plenty to eat; his mother provides him clothes—she can very well afford it! What in reason can he desire more?"

"Bernard," replied Walter, "was never designed for an inglorious, inactive life; he may be an honour to his country, Sir Harbottle, and, before heaven and earth, I again enjoin it upon your conscience—you are bound by the most righteous of ties to provide in every possible way both for the spiritual and temporal well-being of your children!"

"Pray, sir, are you in orders?" asked Sir Harbottle in cool contempt.

"No; but I am not stepping out of my vocation as a man—as a friend to your family, and to yourself, Sir Harbottle, in urging this upon you. Besides, in a politic point of view, the money will be well employed; it will enable your son to maintain himself honourably—he will be less chargeable to you in the long-run."

"Sir," replied the baronet, "you talk about what you do not understand: his living makes no difference in the family expenditure—one

more or one less is never felt; and as to the rest, Lady Grimstone provides for him."

"My dear sir, are you unaware of the precarious state of that excellent lady's life? Your son will become more chargeable to you on his mother's death!"

"Lookye, Mr. Constable, you talk like a greenhorn," answered Sir Harbottle. "Shall I not then come into the possession of the allowance she receives from me—a hundred a year, as you may see by this paper—a copy of the marriage-settlement?" and he pointed to the small deed which he had been reading. "Though, to be sure, this says two hundreds;—and two hundreds she received for fifteen years at least, and then everything dropped in price; the lands at Knighton were lowered half-a-crown an acre, and I could not afford it. A hundred she has had ever since, and Lady Grimstone will not say but she has had it regularly. Two hundreds a year for fifteen years, makes three thousand; and one hundred for twenty-two years, is two thousand two hundred. Five thousand two hundred pounds! I wonder how the deuce it is that women spend so much!"

Walter was shocked and indignant at the unnatural unsusceptibility of his soul, hardened as it was against every generous and kindly sentiment or affection; but he made no remark upon it, and renewed the former topic, determined to bring the interview to a close.

"If, Sir Harbottle," said he, "you are not disposed to advance this small sum as a portion of your son's just claims on you as a father, you cannot object to advancing it as a loan—as money for which you shall receive legal interest?"

"Bernard is not of age," returned Sir Harbottle quickly: "who will be security for him?"

"I will," replied Walter.

"Why, that somewhat alters the case. But lookye, Mr. Constable, I have not as much loose cash by me; I am compelled to put out all I get, as much to secure it from the rapacious hands of those lads—who never scruple breaking a lock, I promise ye, to get at money, the dogs!—as to make it yield some return;—all right and fair, Mr. Constable—a man must do the best he can for himself; and, therefore, it would be inconvenient to me just now to advance it; and

besides, who will pay the cost of drawing up a bond?"

"Deduct it from the money you advance for your son, Sir Harbottle,—we will not make difficulties," said Walter.

"Ay, ay, the money is to be lent to you, Mr. Constable. You will allow me to ask, sir, whether your property is already much encumbered?" Walter's brow reddened, and his eye flashed indignant fire. "For you see, sir," continued Sir Harbottle, "I am accustomed to have unexceptionable security for my money."

"Sir, your money will be secure!—my bond ought to satisfy you; and considering that the benefit of your own son is my only inducement for resorting to this loan, and of which I shall not touch one single sixpence, your scruples are extremely unhandsome—extremely ungentlemanly!"

"So, so, Mr. Constable," said Sir Harbottle soothingly, who was only too well pleased to have acquired thus unexpectedly a power however small over the lands of Westow, on which he had long looked with a jealous eye, lying as they did in the very midst of his own possessions;—"So, so,

there is no need for you to be angry! all in the way of business, sir! Well, three hundred pounds is the sum you want?"

"Yes, sir."

"Pretty soon, I presume, too?"

"The sooner the better!"

"Very well, sir, I will see to it;—to be advanced to you at the usual rate of interest; the interest to be paid half-yearly, and the principal to be paid back on demand?"

"No, sir," interrupted Walter, "not on demand! that might ruin your son. Consider, Sir Harbottle, it is to your own flesh and blood that you are making this Jew-like loan! Heaven and earth! have you no more conscience than to lay a trap like this for your son!"

"So, so, Mr. Constable, you are hot this morning! The loan, sir, is advanced to you,—with my son I will have nothing to do. If you choose to relend, you can; and you can make your own terms. I make mine: I am no novice, sir, in affairs of this kind, — fifteen thousand I put out only the last month!"

"More shame to you, Sir Harbottle, and yet make all this demur and difficulty about giving

your son less than the means of beginning the world with!"

"But my security was good, sir,—unexceptionable security!"

Nothing but his earnest desire to serve Bernard would have induced Walter to continue the negotiation; but for his sake, he subdued his feelings.

"I will sign no bond, Sir Harbottle," he continued, "in which the money is payable on demand! Six months' notice if you please, sir; but not otherwise!"

"Very well, sir, I will endeavour to accommodate you," replied Sir Harbottle, not at all disposed to lose this slight hold on the proprietor of Westow.

And so the interview closed.

CHAPTER VI.

Nothing could exceed the gratitude of Lady Grimstone and her son and daughter, when, on signing the bond, Walter Constable put the required sum into their hands.

The answer he again received from his noble

patron was favourable to all their hopes. Walter and his young friend were requested to join the marquis at his country-seat in a few weeks, where Bernard would be introduced to his new connexions. Lady Grimstone, worn and feeble as she was, revived like the reviving flame of the renewed lamp in the promise of honourable and secure provision for her son; and even Mrs. Constable herself, under the influence of anticipated prosperity, visited again the sick-chamber of her friend, to the inexpressible delight of her son and the Grimstones.

A portion of the money was immediately appropriated to the supply of Bernard's wardrobe, and the remainder was carefully reserved to furnish a fund for any further expenditure.

Hope and prosperity seemed again to dawn upon them; and could security have been given for the life of Lady Grimstone, all would have been perfect happiness. Again the lovers met in the ruined summer-house, and enjoyed their former confidence even more than renewed. Bernard was the life of every place; his sanguine and buoyant heart filled itself with glorious anticipations,—anticipations of poetical achievement,

and consequent reputation, nobler and loftier than poet ever acquired; while visions of beauty and peace which were to come, surrounded him on all hands, and made even the present an elysium. He even persuaded himself that his mother would live,—live to partake with him the realities with which to his fancy the rose-coloured future teemed, and which his unselfish nature could not have enjoyed, had not those most dear to him enjoyed them with him. He rambled through his former haunts, by brook and through woody hollow, and reclined for hours on the sunny and dry slope of a meadow, or among the ferny knolls of some unreclaimed woodland. Happy poet! The hard realities which in truth pressed him on every hand were unregarded,—all was bright, all was tangible; and over all lay the heart-refining sense of a noble and devoted friendship. Life seemed life indeed; and many were the lays which Bernard poured forth in his full-souled enjoyment.

The intimacy between Bernard and Mr. Constable had not all this time escaped the notice of the elder brothers, and many had been the advances which the three had made individually

and collectively to draw him to their faction; well knowing, if little were to be obtained from him in the way of money, yet, lightly esteemed as they were by the world, and continual as were the perplexing circumstances into which their follies and misdeeds were throwing them, that the countenance of a man like Walter Constable would ensure them acceptance, and entitle them to attentions which, for their own merit's sake, they could not command. Most persevering, therefore, had been their attacks upon him; which he had strenuously withstood, although Julia had many a time besought him not to withhold the influence of his countenance and encouragement, believing that through him a salutary effect might be produced upon them.

Whether it was in consequence of what Walter Constable had obtained for their brother Bernard, we know not; but certainly about this time the three, and especially Christopher, sought more than ever to gain his intimacy. Christopher had been now at home for about a week; had gone to bed sober every night, and had been guilty of no domestic outrage for that length of time; and so far had gained extraordinary credit, and on

the strength of it importuned Walter to accompany him in a day's excursion to the bull-running at Tutbury, which was then shortly to take place. Walter ridiculed the idea of *his* going to such a scene—the spectacle itself could afford him no pleasure, and yet he had so invariably resisted all the importunities of the brothers hitherto, that he conceded in this one instance, hoping withal to restrain their excesses by his presence.

Of the outward demeanour of the three elder Grimstones a word may be said. Christopher was a tall and nobly-formed young man, singularly handsome in feature, but with all that reckless expression which marks the confirmed libertine: his dress was always good, and thereat the world wondered—yet it was worn with the characteristic freedom of the debauchee; his hat set knowingly on one side of his head, displaying his richly-curled black hair, handsome temple, and laughing eye, which seemed always roguishly winking: he wore his cravat loose, and amply displayed, from his half-unbuttoned waistcoat, his shirt-frill, pinned with an immense broach. His younger brothers, though in style similar to Christopher, were

far inferior to him in person, with infinitely less address, and less natural talent also: accordingly, they were even less scrupulous than he in their associates or their actions—two beings admirably calculated to be both the dupes and tools of their elder brother; more especially as, with all their faults, they were recklessly good-natured and unselfish; while Christopher was cold-hearted, crafty, and selfish.

Walter was returning to Westow two days previous to the one on which this sport at Tutbury was to take place, when he saw Christopher at the top of a field waiting for his approach. Christopher beat the hedge, and marked little circles with the heal of his shoe, and larger ones with the whole length of his foot, in the dry marly soil of the headland on which he stood, till Walter reached him, and then with an unusually polite bow he accosted him.

"I am sure, Mr. Constable, I am very glad you will give us your company on Tuesday—prime sport it will be!"

"So Mr. George Grimstone tells me," returned Walter, walking on, Christopher accompanying him.

"What! has he told you of all old Haughton's schemes to make the day full of diversions?—of the grinning-matches, and the jumping in sacks, and all that?"

"Yes," said Walter, "and of a fair lady who is to be there beside."

"The devil he has!" exclaimed Christopher.

"It is a lucky thing for you, Grimstone," said Walter, laughing, "that a lover is not, like a servant, obliged to produce a character."

"Why, look ye, Mr. Constable," returned he, "I am perfectly steady now—and I mean to reform in good earnest. Hang it! I've sown all my wild oats; and they turn out such a bad crop—so confoundedly smutty, I'll e'en try what good sound oats will produce. You'll certainly see, Mr. Constable, what a creditable fellow I shall grow;" and Christopher laughed loudly.

"I am glad that you even *think* of reforming," said Walter.

"You see, Mr. Constable," said Christopher, "the world thinks so much of who a man is with—Heaven bless the world for the most faultless of judges!—but that has been my misfortune."

"You have not had the credit of the best companions, certainly," was Constable's reply.

"And yet many of them were good fellows enough," returned Grimstone: "but that won't do now-a-days. You, on the contrary, have a famous good name; I want you therefore to help me with it. I tell you, seriously, I mean to reform; d—— it, I do!"

"You will always find me ready to assist you in so good a work as your own reformation; but you must explain yourself farther," said Walter, who had no confidence in Grimstone's professions; "for, to be candid with you, I cannot give you credit for this proposed reformation, without imagining you to have some covert motive — some end to be obtained of personal advantage or convenience."

"You are a deep hand," replied Grimstone; "but I too will be honest with you. I *have* a motive, and an end of personal advantage to be gained: I want to marry Miss Hammond!"

"Excellent!" exclaimed Walter.

"A glorious creature she is!" continued the other; "a prodigious heiress too, and cousin to some dozen of earls."

"Upon my word, you are aspiring! But are you not outrunning chances?"

"Yes, yes," replied Grimstone; "you think that a lady highly connected, divinely handsome, and immensely rich, as Miss Hammond is, will have nothing to say to a fellow like me. My reply is, that all women are not alike. I have been a lucky dog in my day; and if the girl fancies me, why that's everything."

"To be sure!" said Constable, laughing.

"Now, if a good fellow like you will stand by me, I am a made man," said Christopher. "You must speak a good word for me!"

"How?—this lady is a perfect stranger to me."

"This lady's friends know you, and think mighty well of you," replied Grimstone: "she told me so herself."

"Hammond?—Hammond?" repeated Walter, endeavouring to recall any former knowledge of the name.

"Oh, hang it!" interrupted Christopher; "their names may not be Hammond."

"And does your fair one present herself at a scene like this at Tutbury?"

"Oh, Lord bless you!" she will come with the Haughtons, and half the gentry of the country—everybody will be there: and besides, she is not one of your she-saints, Constable. 'Gad! if you were not an honourable fellow, I would not introduce you to her.—But you'll speak a good word for me, will you?"

"I must know to whom it is to be spoken first," said Walter.

"Oh, that you'll find when you are there. I do not know myself who they are,—but somebody that thinks confoundedly well of you. You'll promise me?"

"No, certainly not," replied Walter.

"Well, this is enhancing a favour with a vengeance!" returned Grimstone. "I'd have been hanged before I would have asked a favour from you if I had thought you would have hummed and ha'd in this way!"

"I cannot, in my conscience," replied Walter, "promote a connexion which, I fear, might end in disappointment and misery. I have not sufficient confidence in you, Grimstone!"

Christopher suddenly stopped, and looking at

Walter with an expression of unwonted earnestness and sincerity, addressed him—

"Mr. Constable, I never knew the worth of a good name till I knew you! You love Julia—she is an excellent creature; you are the friend of Bernard, and he deserves your friendship: and now for me, who am willing to begin a new life and shame none of you, you demur as if I wanted to pick your pocket!"

"Give me cause to suppose your reformation real," replied Walter, moving onward, "and no one will be more ready than I to assist you in everything reasonable."

"Well, if you won't promise me out and out, you'll think about it—mention it to Julia!"

"Yes, yes, I will think of it," said Walter, hesitating to open the gate leading to Westow, and at which they had now arrived, unwilling to present to his mother so unwelcome a visiter as Christopher Grimstone.

"Oh—ay, think of it!" repeated Christopher, in a tone of vexation, as he turned from Walter, and perhaps comprehending why rather inhospitably he delayed to open the gate of his own demesne "—yes, think of it! and go to the devil

with you, for an ill-natured, cold-blooded, sanctimonious curmudgeon!"

The next evening, when Walter entered the apartment of Lady Grimstone, he found her more death-like and feeble than hitherto, relapsed into her former worn and debilitated state. She was still, however, sitting before the window in her large cushioned chair, and Julia was leaning over her weeping bitterly.

"You are come as usual at the right time," said Lady Grimstone, turning her sunken countenance upon Walter with a smile of sorrowful but cordial welcome. "My eyes are dim," continued she, directing her sight through the window; "but to me it seems that the reapers are busy in the corn. Tell me, Walter; your eyes are strong, for this poor girl cannot see for weeping."

"Your sight has not deceived you, dearest lady," replied Walter cheerfully, and thinking it best to make light of the subject.

"My time grows short, then," returned Lady Grimstone: "a week perhaps—at farthest ten days, and I shall be at rest!"

"These are superstitious notions," said Walter: "life is uncertain to us all."

"I know it, Mr. Constable, I know it; but for me, my days are numbered. Sit down beside me, my friend; I have earnestly desired to see you."

Walter sat down; and Julia, assured as she always was by the presence of her lover, dried her tears and leaned on the back of her mother's chair.

"My son Christopher has been with me even now," said the dying lady. "Oh, Mr. Constable, what a hope has arisen upon my waning life! Heaven has surely sent you for the salvation of this degraded house; you will not withhold your countenance—you will stand by him in this affair?"

"Dearest lady," replied Walter, "Miss Hammond is totally unknown to me: besides, I cannot feel justified in promoting such a connexion." The words seemed harsh to Walter as he spoke them, and he qualified them by a look and tone of sympathy and kindness.

The tears streamed from the sunken eyes of

Lady Grimstone. "Ah," said she, "if you cannot stand by us, who then will!"

"God knows," returned Walter, deeply moved, "I would stand by you even to the death!"

"Pardon me, pardon me,—I am unreasonable; but oh, Mr. Constable," replied Lady Grimstone, with an energy that seemed incompatible with her feeble frame, "this is my first-born; and none but a mother knows how dear is her first-born! Christopher may be reclaimed, think of that! and so much, so very much depends upon him!—he has unknown influence with his brothers, with his father too,—everything depends upon him! Do not abandon him! he voluntarily seeks to you for help—for example! Oh, my friend, you who are rich in a good name, do not withhold it from a poor brother! What a heavenly light will stream in upon my dying hour when I think of meeting all my children in bliss!—their father too! Oh, Mother of Mercies, I bless thee, and thy dear Son who bore his agony on the cross, and suffered shame and want for the sake of sinners!" exclaimed she, kissing with devotion the crucifix which lay on

her breast. Julia, again unable to restrain her emotion, buried her face in the cushions of her mother's chair. Walter replied not, for his heart was torn with conflicting sentiments.

"Let me put my poor sinful children, as well as my guiltless ones, under your care," continued she, after the passion of her emotion had a little subsided; "and remember, that he who turneth many to righteousness shall shine forth as the stars in the firmament of heaven! Remember this, and may the Almighty Father and Ruler of events abundantly bless and reward you!"

Walter still hesitated to answer; but he felt, spite of his better judgment, his resolution giving way before the words of Lady Grimstone and the beseeching eyes of his beloved Julia.

"I demand no promise from you," said the dying mother, feeling the reluctance which Walter's silence implied; "you have already made us deeply your debtors; I bind you by no promise, but I confide in your goodness!"

"For the reverence I have for you, dearest lady,—for my love for Julia, my friendship for Bernard,—I will do my utmost for the reclaiming of these young men!" was Walter's reply.

Lady Grimstone took his hand and poured a solemn benediction upon him; and the tearful eyes of Julia spoke gratitude and affection beyond words.

CHAPTER VII.

On the morning of the fifteenth of August, Walter Constable mounted his horse and rode down the avenue, at the gate of which he found Christopher, unaccompanied by his brothers, already waiting. Walter could not help noticing the unusually handsome appearance of his companion, apparelled as he was in a most fashionable and even costly suit, and mounted on a horse far superior to any which the miserable stud of Sir Harbottle Grimstone could have furnished. Christopher was in exuberant spirits, and would have edified his companion by all imaginable sallies of merriment, but that Walter that morning was in no mood for jest or conversation. His mind was at war with itself: he felt that he would fain oblige Lady Grimstone and Julia by attempting to reform or assist her brothers; but his under-

standing represented the attempt as hopeless to them, and very possibly injurious to himself. He felt therefore ill at ease, and after several unsuccessful essays on the part of Christopher, he gave them up in despair, cursing him as the greatest flat under the sun, and thenceforward confining his animation to his own breast, or giving it only occasional vent in the humours of a half-sung song or half-whistled air.

The morning was as splendid as an autumnal morning could be. The atmosphere was in that state of resplendent transparency peculiar to the season; the most distant horizon shone out clearly defined, and the whole landscape lay as if painted in colours of light. On every hand stretched out meadows green with the abundant after-crop of grass, in which herds of cattle were luxuriantly pasturing; and on every slope the corn stood in sheaves, fell before the busy sickle of the reapers, or was borne away in the loaded waggon. Gleaners and harvesters were abroad; and not a field but presented some group or figure of rural beauty or interest. By the dry and dusty way-side the light hare-bell nodded, and the minutely-flowered spikes of the yellow

bed-straw were seen among the white and wiry bents; the crimson foxglove and the golden snap-dragon contrasted their beautiful colours on the hedge-banks, and the long sprays of the black-berry bowed with their yet crude but heavy clusters of fruit.

Minute as these individual features of the splendid and abundant autumn were, they formed a whole of extraordinary beauty, and of that silent yet strong influence which operates on the mind of the beholder. Walter felt its full effect; his mind was tranquillized by the harmonious beauty of earth and sky, and without thinking of enjoyment he rode on, finding in everything that presented itself to him a source of deep and earnest delight.

The whole landscape, too, was one of extraordinary and Arcadian beauty. The valley of the Dove, the wooded slopes of Needwood, the richly-timbered park and farms of Sudbury; and then, the finely-varied champaign of meadow, corn-land, and wood, in the midst of which rose the hill of Tutbury, crowned with the far-seen ruined towers of its castle;—its castle, famous in history, the once almost regal abode of the

Dukes of Lancaster, and of the most potent of them, John of Gaunt himself, to whose minstrels he ordered to be given, on this holy day of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin, a bull, not to be contended for in song, but by strength and dexterity of limb.

This custom, the well-known Tutbury bull-running, though the race of Lancaster was extinct, their castle a pile of ruins, and the order of minstrels, like other feudal institutions, gone to dust, yet remained,—a rude sport, honoured but little by the noble and the fair, but yet religiously observed by the peasants of the counties of Stafford and Derby, on whose confines Tutbury stood.

At the time of which we write, and but a very few years before the custom was abolished altogether, it had been attempted by one Colonel Haughton, a man of large property, but of eccentric habits and tastes, and a great patron of all rural sports and festivities whatever, to revive the custom of the bull-running with somewhat of its ancient honours. Neither pains nor expense were spared by him to give the occasion a general interest and *éclat:* he even pro-

posed instituting for the purpose a band of minstrels, who, harp in hand, and habited in robe and girdle, were to edify the assembled multitude with their strains, and afterwards contend for the bull by the more legitimate means. But this laudable endeavour was abandoned from the difficulty of finding a sufficient number of qualified persons: hundreds could run over meadow, and even swim the river itself, in pursuit of the four-footed guerdon; but not five men could be found who were capable of chanting a stanza to the tinkling of a harp. Instead thereof, every rural game was to be exhibited, no matter how absurd or ridiculous: grinning through horse-collars, running-matches of old women, or jumping in sacks,—these were to occupy the morning; —the bull-running, the grand event of the day, according to ancient usage, commenced in the afternoon.

As Walter and his companion advanced on the road, they saw, from all the villages through which they passed, groups on foot, or in every variety of vehicle, setting out or on their way to the scene of attraction. Sturdy and athletic countrymen, too, with sunburnt faces and hands, who

had left the harvest-field, the forge, and every variety of handicraft-trades, and wearing their broad ribbon-scarfs of blue or red, according to which county they belonged, might be seen on the road singly, or in companies of threes and fours, increasing in frequency as they approached the town. From the topmost tower of the castle also had been seen to wave, from the time the ruins first came in view,—in fact, had waved there from the earliest morning,—two banners of the rival colours; and as they neared the town, the sounds of music reached them, coming with a full swell, or dying away to the low breathing of remote melody, according as the wind or the turns in the road brought it nearer or made it more distant.

But before we enter the town, an incident must be related, which at the moment considerably amused Walter, and was characteristic of the person in whose company he was riding. In passing the last village, before they reached Tutbury, two grooms in handsome livery rode out from the yard of the small public-house, and touching their hats to Christopher, took their place in attendance.

"You have not been negligent in the style of your retinue, Mr. Grimstone," said Walter.

"Why, plague take it!" replied he, "one must do as others do!"

Walter might have said, what he thought, that the means by which these things were done were mysterious, seeing that Sir Harbottle would not advance one hundredth part of what they must cost; but he forbore, knowing that suspicion went sorely against the brothers on this subject. They had not ridden far, however, before Christopher stopped his horse to speak to his attendants, evidently desirous at the same time of speaking to them unobserved by Mr. Constable. Walter was struck instantly with a resemblance, which, notwithstanding their disguise, the two bore to the younger Grimstones; and the thick under-tones of George's voice, which could not be disguised, as he replied, confirmed his suspicion. The young men were evidently acting as servants to their brother, to whom on this day, perhaps, some extraordinary outward show or ceremonial was considered necessary: doubtless they were to be rewarded out of the fair lady's coffers.

"Your brothers act as grooms to-day, Mr. Grimstone," said Walter, determined to show that he was not unobservant.

"No, d—me, not they!" was his quick reply.

"Come, come," said Walter, "I might pardon the practical lie; but not a deliberate falsehood like that."

"Why, lookye now, Mr. Constable," replied he, evidently chagrined, and yet desirous of soothing him, "I did not mean to offend you; but, hang it! one's forced to all sorts of schemes to make a decent show."

Walter fell into a thoughtful silence; and with this concession he and his companions entered Tutbury.

The little town was full of bustle and animation: townspeople were passing nimbly to and fro; the bells were ringing; booths covered with thin white awnings stood in the wider parts of the streets, where various kinds of confections and cheap refreshments were offered for sale; country vehicles, driven in by countrymen in their clean carter's frocks, or Sunday coats and hats, and filled with gaily-attired women and girls, rat-

tled by ever and anon: and before the only inn in the place, two or three gentlemen's carriages and post-chaises, from which the horses had been taken, told that some more dignified arrivals had already taken place; and through the open upper windows might be now and then seen the lovely face of some fair maiden who had thence alighted, an object of bright attraction to the young men who crowded the street below and cast upward many a furtive glance.

Christopher, who objected to enter this inn on account of the crowd who would be at it, and the indifferent accommodation there would be for their horses, proposed their riding to a small, but to him well-known hostelry, where they would have no reason to complain of their treatment. All this was a matter of indifference to Walter Constable, and he cheerfully agreed. They, therefore, rode through the town, and stopped at a small house kept by one Milly Freckleton, who, as the painted board over her door intimated, offered good accommodation for man and horse.

Christopher, giving his own and Walter's horses to his grooms, entered the house, and with-

out ceremony opened the door of a neat, small parlour, looking into a garden shady with trees and bright with autumn flowers, into which he ushered Walter Constable. No sooner had Christopher entered, than the old landlady, who saw him from her kitchen, advanced, receiving him with almost maternal kindness.

"Ay, Mr. Christopher, and so you are come at last! Well, I says, says I to Peggy, if aught will fetch him, this day will!" She stopped suddenly on seeing a stranger, and dropping a courtesy, begged Walter's pardon, saying she was "always main glad to see Mr. Grimstone."

"Let us have a good luncheon, mother!" said Christopher; "quick! the best you have; and those fellows of mine must not too often see the bottom of your brown jug! D'ye hear!" said he, as the old woman went off with alacrity to attend to his orders.

"Your landlady welcomes you cordially," said Walter.

"She is a good old soul, and nursed me night and day for three weeks this very spring: I might have been a dead man now but for her care," was Grimstone's reply.

Christopher presently afterwards went out, and the old woman bustled in again with a clean napkin and tray.

"I mun e'en sarve you myself, for my granddaughter is out o'call. Young folks is so thoughtless," said she, as she arranged the new white loaf, the rich cheese, and the delicate butter on the table.

"And you are a friend o' Mr. Christopher's?" said she, looking at him attentively, when, after fidgeting about, dusting the table and chairs with her apron, she could find nothing else to do; "and yet you was not here with him in the spring!"

"No," replied Walter.

"What, th' ould man 's living yet, I reckon!"

"Sir Harbottle Grimstone?" asked he.

"Ay."

"He is living, and likely to live," replied her guest.

"What 's naught lasts th' longest!" muttered she. "Well, I wonder where this wench is! But I 'll get ye summut to drink,—Mr. Grimstone reckons our tap none of the worst;" and so saying, she again went out.

A quarter of an hour elapsed, and Christopher

did not make his appearance; and Walter, invited into the garden by its sunshine, its shade, and its old-fashioned tidiness, leapt through the large open casement into it. For some time he amused himself with studying the effusions of country wit inscribed on the benches and the little tables before them, and marvelled at the extraordinary patience which it must have required to cut sundry well-defined true-love knots and intricate stars into the hard wood with a penknife, which had probably been the only tool, when his attention was diverted by the low weeping voice of a female in an adjoining arbour; and looking round through the woven-branches, he saw to his amazement a very lovely young woman leaning on the shoulder of Grimstone, and evidently pleading with him in the bitterest distress. Christopher had his arm round her waist, and was speaking in a tone of kindness, though the words seemed to give the poor girl no consolation. The next moment the old landlady hobbled into the garden, calling at the top of her voice,

"Peggy! Peggy Woodhouse!"

The young woman hastily disengaged herself,

and answered that she was coming. She wiped her eyes with her apron, put a small packet in her bosom, and ran out; while Christopher, apparently embarrassed, pulled to pieces a branch of early-blowing phlox which he held in his hand.

Walter walked onward and stood before the arbour, and Christopher instantly assumed a perfectly unconcerned air. For the first time in his life almost, Walter Constable knew not how to act; he had been a spy on the lovers, and though he was convinced of heartlessness and villany on the part of Grimstone, he forbore to upbraid him, because by so doing he must in some measure compromise himself. He resolved therefore to watch for some opportunity of so doing, which he doubted not would occur in the course of the day, and returned with him to the parlour, where they sat down to their refreshment.

The fair Peggy, however, did not make her appearance; the old grandmother herself waiting on her guests with the most devoted attention, though, as if by a signal from Christopher, refraining from all familiarity.

When the two had refreshed themselves, they

walked out into the town, which was now thronged with its assembled people and visiters, to witness the various sports which were going forward. As Christopher had said, many of the gentry were there, though as yet but few ladies; and as if to parade his companion, on whose arm he ostentatiously leaned, he went from sport to sport, thrusting into the thickest crowds, and attracting attention by his loud-spoken jests and observations: and Walter found that, if not with one of the most honourable, he was with one of the most known of the Tutbury visiters,—and with one, at the same time, who entered into every sport with the most earnest zest, and whose opinion was not unfrequently appealed to as decisive.

An hour before noon, however, the arrival of the grandees—an earl, the guest of Colonel Haughton—the earl's ward, the beautiful Miss Hammond, and a numerous and splendid train who attended them, diverted public attention from all minor persons, and even for a few minutes interrupted the grinning-match itself. To Christopher's disappointment, the ladies did not honour these inferior games by their presence; but, before

long, the gracious nobleman and an accession of gentlemen joined the assembled spectators, the public attention being for the first five minutes about equally divided between the rival combatants and the new-comers, while the visages protruded through the horse-collars grinned even into redoubled grotesque hideousness in honour of the noble eyes that looked on.

Walter immediately recognised the nobleman to be the Earl of N——, whom he had met while abroad, a remarkably proud and aristocratic person; and he marvelled what could be the strange chance which had brought him to a scene like this. Walter supposed himself barely known, if at all remembered by him, and therefore thought not of introducing himself to his notice; but this was one of the relations of whom Grimstone had spoken, and accordingly he urged him to present himself for the purpose of introducing him.

"The earl is looking this way, Constable; his eyes are on you at this moment;—let us go to him! He is seeking to attract your attention!"

"Perhaps so," replied Walter with assumed indifference, now feeling the sense of the situation in which he had placed himself by consenting

to accompany Christopher hither, more disagreeable and mortifying than he had anticipated. While he supposed that there would be merely a concourse of country-people there, or of those neighbouring gentry who were not too refined or elevated to see much that was strange in such a conjunction of casual association as that of Walter and Christopher, it mattered little; but now that he found that a different class, and one more likely to note such things, was likely to be present, he shrunk into himself with feelings of shame and vexation.

"Come, you 'll introduce me!" urged Christopher. "Why, you 'll not shy off now, — you 'll never be so shabby, will you! You promised to introduce me!"

"I shall not even introduce myself," replied Walter, "much less another person."

At that very moment, the earl, who, as Christopher had said, had been observing Walter for some time, left his own party to accost him, and, offering his hand, expressed his sincere pleasure in thus unexpectedly meeting him.

While Walter was making his acknowledgment, his lordship's attention was demanded by

Colonel Haughton, to decide between two rival grins; and he again joined his own party.

"Well," said Christopher, with an oath, "you're the most shame-faced, chicken-hearted fellow in the universe!" and flinging from him, he joined himself to a knot of his own associates. After a while, when this match was over, and the spectators began to disperse, Christopher again returned, begging pardon for his rudeness and violent temper, and endeavouring by all means to regain Walter's favour, which he thought he might have lost; but Christopher's ebullition of anger had made no difference to him, and without either noticing that, or the pains he took to flatter him to forgiveness, accompanied him out of the crowd. Grimstone conducted him into a set of dissolute fellows, low gamblers, who were betting on a donkey-race. They had all deep designs on Walter Constable, and Grimstone thought he would here revenge the affront he had just received at his hands. But Walter was not a man to be the dupe of such as these; at the same time he was a curious inquirer into human nature, and an interested spectator of every developement of human character

and passion, and stood among these choice spirits of the day and scene, penetrating all their designs, and baffling their arts. They were a set of brutal, swaggering, and reckless men, many of them wearing the garb of gentlemen, but with manners and avowing sentiments which were only worthy of the most hardened and unprincipled profligates. It was soon seen that Constable, instead of being a dupe, could only be a spy upon them, — a hindrance and a restraint; and many, therefore, were the efforts which Christopher used to free himself from him. But here at least Walter would not be shaken off, hoping that the restraint of his presence, or the desire still to preserve his favourable opinion, would withhold him from any gross act of indiscretion. But Walter was mistaken. Christopher found it better, from some cause or other, to disconnect himself from him; and, before long, he was alone. The three were gone, he knew not whither; and hardly knowing whether to be vexed or pleased at losing control over them, he dismissed them from his thoughts, resolving to enjoy the humours of the day since he *was* there, and leave them to take care of themselves.

At the exact hour of noon, the various games being finished, the bull, a noble creature, bred in the rich meadows of the Dove, brindled like a pard, with sharp short horns curved like the crescent moon, a thickly curled front, and eyes of intense lustre though of mild expression, was led through the streets by a strong chain passed over his horns, drawing away man, woman, and child from all minor spectacles, — the first immediately to fall into the procession, and the second to flee away to covert, till, reassured by the meek demeanour of the creature, they joined the rear of the crowd. A more beautiful animal of his kind never fed in the meadows of ancient Thessaly; and Walter, as he saw him garlanded with flowers, and bound with shining ribbons, led onward, strong yet passive, faultless in form, and attended by a thronging multitude, bethought himself of the old days of Grecian rites, when processions like this, and of which even this might perhaps be a remnant, passed along through grove and valley, and from every little town, and were immortalized in bas-relief on many a marble frieze, or in poetry, living and breathing, like the reality itself.

CHAPTER VIII.

The crowd went by, and Walter turned to the castle-hill, noticing with admiration on his way the fine old church, with its low, broad, and circular entrance of exquisite Saxon architecture, adorned with its grand moulding of alternate grotesque figures and zig-zag work, a part of the old Priory Church. All the world as well as Walter Constable were bound to the castle-hill, not only for the view of the sport below, but because it had been given out that Miss Hammond and the *élite* who attended her would be there on horseback, themselves no undesirable show.

It was with no common interest that Walter went over the ruins that crowned the hill. He thought of the times when the old Mercian kings had their impregnable stronghold upon that hill, and looked round upon their subject kingdom, —a forest-covered region, unlike the present fair and smiling landscape, but where even then the bright river rolled along, and trees grew upon the slopes of Needwood, as now; two features unchanged in the scene through the lapse of so

many hundred years. He thought of the days when the Dukes of Lancaster lorded it here with the authority of sovereigns, and when the minstrel was so much honoured—honoured not merely for his power to amuse, but because the administration of law was put in his hands; an incongruous office perhaps, but which gave his calling dignity. "A thousand pities it is," thought Walter, "that our friend Bernard Grimstone had not lived in those days! We might have come here then to have seen him crowned King of the Minstrels!"

Beyond all this, Walter mused on Mary Stuart,

"That Helen of a barbarous age,"

who passed within these walls so many years of her dolorous captivity; and with a romantic interest, such as the young feel ever on such occasions, he looked from the ruins on the eastern side, where the queen's apartments were situated, over the sunny and smiling meadows below, with their preparations for the day's sport, thinking that the time was when the bright eyes of the queen herself were perhaps beguiled of their tears when looking upon the scene such as he saw it at that very moment. All this tenderness of

sentiment would have been more in character for Bernard than his less excitable friend. Walter, however, indited no sonnet; Bernard would have done so;—and that made a great difference.

It was a beautiful sight, in truth, on which Walter Constable looked on every hand. The whole area of the ruins was filled with a gay and gathering assembly; the clear, blue sky was stretching above them; the silent, majestic ruins encircled them on three sides, while on the north-west it lay open to that glorious landscape of meadow, river, and forest, with an open Arcadian country, including towns, villages, and noblemen's seats, an extent of thirty miles.

The area of the castle-hill itself was a fine turf, green and smooth as a lawn, on which was met that gay and motley assembly, some standing in groups, some strolling leisurely about, and others perched upon tower or crumbling wall. Two tents were pitched upon the very verge of the hill, whence the more dignified company might witness the sport in the meadows below. Gay ribbon-streamers were fluttering from the poles of each tent; and a small company of

musicians, who had stationed themselves among the ruins, filled the warm, bright air with the melody of wind-instruments. Walter's pulse quickened with enthusiasm as he gazed round and felt at once the picturesque and beautiful effect of the whole scene and its accompaniments.

Presently the crowd dispersed to right and left from before the old gateway, and, with trumpets blown before them, by half-a-dozen men in quaint liveries and with badges on their arms, a long and stately cavalcade rode leisurely in, three a-breast—a lady escorted by a gentleman on either hand.

The cavalcade passed into the court, the rear being brought up by serving-men, mounted, and in rich but ancient dresses. After a circuit round the western side of the court, which brought them to the tents, the trumpets ceased to blow, and about half the company dismounted and entered them, their horses being led away by grooms who attended for the purpose, and the remainder of the cavalcade arranged themselves promiscuously. Walter observed that Christopher Grimstone was there on horseback, and attended by

his grooms; but he was so much engrossed by watching Miss Hammond as to appear unconscious of him.

Walter saw that Grimstone's report had not exaggerated the beauty of this fair lady. She was such as Cleopatra might have been—of a haughty and regal style of beauty; and he wondered yet more and more at the presumption of Grimstone. Her dress was singularly simple—a green riding-habit, with a velvet hat; her hair, of an intense blackness, was tightly braided on her forehead; and the small and delicately-chiselled ear,—between which, and the smooth, round cheek, as if for contrast, went the narrow black ribbon that fastened her hat,—was bare; the throat too was bare, in its pure whiteness set off even by the small but richly-wrought cambric collar that surrounded it; while the close-fitting riding-dress revealed a bust of the most perfect symmetry. Walter contemplated her with unfeigned admiration; she was indeed the finest woman he had ever seen; and though Grimstone's passion seemed to his mind more hopeless, more like fatuity than ever, he pardoned him for indulging it.

On her right was an older lady, the one who

had ridden first in the procession, escorted by Colonel Haughton and the earl, habited like Miss Hammond, excepting that the colour was many shades darker, and the whole style less youthful: she too was a haughty and beautiful woman, and from the younger lady's resemblance to her, Walter concluded this to be her mother. On the left hand of Miss Hammond was a young man of slight and effeminate person, remarkable for his singularly fashionable dress and entirely self-satisfied air. Other gentlemen paid their court to the beauty, and came and went, receiving a haughty smile or a passing word; but this cavalier maintained his place at her side as he had entered the court — patted her horse, was privileged to jest with her, and received from her fair hand an admonition with her riding-whip, which even showed more like favour than all the words and looks which, as if intending to do him honour, or as if he alone were worthy of her regard, she from time to time lavished upon him. He was evidently a favoured lover, and Walter looked to Grimstone to see how he bore the discovery. His countenance was flushed, and his eye riveted upon him in angry jealousy; he pricked

his horse with his spurs, and then suddenly checked him, till the creature, fretted and impatient, pawed and reared, and would have thrown his rider had he not been perfectly master of his saddle. All eyes were turned upon him, even those of his mistress and her young lover. Walter thought he perceived a smile of derision on the lips of the lady; he was sure that the youth was permitted a jest at his expense.

"Who is the gentleman that occupies so much of Miss Hammond's attention?" asked he of one who stood by him.

"The Honourable Henry Finch," was the reply: "his uncle, the Earl of N——, is in the tent with Colonel Haughton."

Walter again turned to look at Grimstone; but he had assumed an apparent self-command, and was at that moment speaking to his brothers. What, however, was Walter's indignation to see him, the very next moment, ride straight into the middle of the crowd, and forcing his horse between that of Miss Hammond and Mr. Finch, address her with insolent confidence! He felt as if his breath were suspended, and yet with intense anxiety waited for whatever would next take place.

The reception of Grimstone was that of annihilating disdain; and without appearing to return his salutation, she urged her horse forward. Mr. Finch was again in attendance; and wheeling round with an evolution worthy of a horse-soldier, she took her place on the other side of her mother, with her more favoured cavalier still beside her. The action was instantaneous, and Christopher, as instantaneously, again thrust between them, swearing he would knock any man from his saddle who attemped to displace him; and, at the same time, he struck his rival's horse so violently on the flanks, that it sprang suddenly aside, and its rider was thrown. The whole company was in instant confusion. The ladies, escorted by part of the gentlemen, retired to a distance. The company within the tents, alarmed by the confusion, rushed out, increasing the confusion still more by not knowing exactly what had occurred. One crowd gathered about Mr. Finch, who, however, was not hurt, and soon remounted; and another about Grimstone. Loud and angry were the vociferations which assailed him, and most vehement the indignation. He was compelled to dismount; and spite of the violent efforts he used to free himself,

and the volleys of angry oaths which he poured forth, he was consigned into more strong but less gentlemanly hands, and conducted out of the castle yard; his brothers, or grooms, to whom his horse was given, following after.

Walter, equally indignant with the rest at this audacious outrage, had rushed in upon him; but his reproof and remonstrance were lost in the vehemence of the general displeasure, and supposing him to be drunk, and seeing him borne away as he hoped to some place of confinement for the rest of the day, though he could not help feeling infinitely annoyed at the occurrence, dismissed further care about him,—and especially as Miss Hammond, her young lover, and their gay attendants, were again drawn up apparently in reassured equanimity, and the trumpet was blown which announced the sport about to begin, and the attention of every one was diverted to other objects. Walter, chagrined as he was, hoped that this offence of Grimstone might not be otherwise considered than as a drunken sally; whereas Mr. Finch and the lady's friends looked upon it as a personal assault, and, for reasons which are afterwards to be disclosed, the earl took especial umbrage at it.

Christopher was taken into custody for an assault on the noble person of Henry Finch, and at this very time was being conveyed to the house of Justice Halliday, the nearest magistrate, for committal.

In order to have a yet more perfect view than the crowded area of the castle-court afforded, Walter descended the hill about one third, as many besides himself had done, till the whole hill-side was alive with people. He drew a little apart from the crowd, and sat down among the dry grass, the green waving fern, and the crimson betony. What an animated scene lay below him! It mattered not to him what the occasion was which had assembled those eager crowds, they in themselves were beautiful.

The parts of the meadow near the town were inclosed with strong palisades, within which were booths erected, each displaying some sign or blazonry painted in gaudy colours, and whence issued music and sounds of revelry. Everything was full of exhilaration and happiness. Beyond the palisades, and stretching onward for several hundred yards, were drawn out the two bands of runners—Derbyshire and Staffordshire men, stripped to their

shirts and pantaloons, with bare heads, and scarfed with their respective colours of red and blue, waiting for the bull which was about to be led out. The trumpet was again blown from the castle-hill: the music below instantly ceased, as well as every other sound; the faces of the hundreds below were all turned upward, and the long, clear clangour of the trumpet seemed to fill the whole extent of the landscape. The trumpet ceased, and even while the ear was filled with the sound it was sensible of a universal silence. The next moment a movement was observed below; a shout burst forth, and the bull, still wearing his garlands, was led forth between the two bands of runners. The bull had been rubbed over with soap in order to render him slippery to the touch, and therefore less easy to be caught: the barbarous custom of mutilation had been long abolished. The chain was disengaged from his horns, he was pricked on with a goad, and then, with a bellow like low thunder, he burst through the men of Staffordshire, who sprang right and left from before him, into the freedom of the meadows. The garlands with which he was bound burst from him, as he

put forth the mighty sinews of his frame, as if he had flung them off in very derision.

Away he went, tossing his head in the joyous belief of regained liberty. The crowd rushed after him with impatient shouts, pursuing him in two eager but separate parties. The bull faced about upon his pursuers, but with no appearance of hostility, allowing them to approach almost within arm's length. A murmur of disapprobation passed through the spectators, in the belief that the animal, powerful and thorough-bred as he was, would show no sport, but suffer himself to be tamely captured. The moment, however, the hands of either party were almost upon him, he wheeled round with perfect coolness and as if in contempt of them, levelling the inner circle to the ground with one sweep of his head, and then with a shrill cry, more like a scream than a bellow, dashed through the surrounding crowd, overturning many a one, and again scoured off over the meadows, bearing his tail aloft and shaking his head as he went. The discomfited parties again turned in pursuit, leaving their fallen comrades to shift for themselves; and these also, of whom none were hurt,

were soon on their feet again and in active pursuit.

The bull prepared himself to practise again the same manœuvre; but the men were not equally confident, and approached with much more caution. Each party advanced in a firm semicircular phalanx from opposite sides, each desiring to get the start of the other, and yet neither coming within many yards of him, and gradually completing their circle so as to inclose him on all sides. The creature seemed to find sport in all this, and looked slowly round him from side to side:—it was like the child's play of "the bull in the park," and he seemed as if looking round for the weak place through which to make his escape. Instead however of bursting through them, he cleared them with a bound, as he would have cleared the low fence of a field. Not a single man had fallen; and so instantaneous was his movement, that the circle remained entire when he was on the other side; and then, as if in perfect contempt of them, he began quietly to graze.

The spectators saw wonderful amusement in all this, and shouts and acclamations echoed from the hill. The pursuers, however, either thought

themselves fooled by the bull, or they were impatient of his good temper, and used therefore every possible means to irritate him ; they pelted him with stones, railed at him, bellowed, and shook their handkerchiefs in his face, while others with long sticks sharply pointed with iron pricked him in various parts of the body. The blood followed the wounds, and the creature was excited to rage. The sport then began anew ; he being no longer the pursued, but the pursuer. He roared, he tore the ground with his horns, his eyes flashed fire, and his dilated nostrils seemed to emit steam ; he leapt here and there ; he dashed through the crowd wherever it collected, with shrill, short bellowings, and occasionally singled out an individual whom he pursued with determined enmity, goring and tearing him till he was covered with blood, and only was diverted from killing him outright by some new and ingenious mode of torment which the others employed to turn his fury to new objects. The courage of the men was amazing, and yet now and then a cry of human terror or agony was made frightfully audible through the general silence with which the contest was witnessed.

No attempt was now made to take the bull; all were employed in preserving themselves, and for the present it was their object to excite him to the most violent exertions in order that he might tire himself out. His colour no longer was dark—the soap with which he was smeared had worked into a snow-white foam which covered him all over, and as it trickled from his forehead into his eyes, made his fury yet more terrific. Many men in the course of this transport of pain and rage were disabled by him, and either crept away to the booths, or were carried thither by their companions.

The bull in the mean time, burning with thirst and mad with pain, plunged into the river, dashing the water to an amazing height, and changing it into white foam with the lather that was washed from his sides. Here he found some relief from his torments, and plunging yet deeper into the stream, stood and bellowed at his pursuers, who ranged themselves on the banks impatient to plunge in after him.

Walter had seen all this with intense interest, forgetting in the animation of the sport whatever his sober reason might have objected against

it; but his attention was now entirely diverted from the whole scene by seeing a boy, one of the very few servants employed at Denborough Park, who, hurried and hot, hastily descended the hill to where he sat. The boy presented him with a letter, which he begged him to read instantly, and then sat down at some distance wiping his hot brow, and gazing with eager delight on the scene below.

The letter was from Julia, and was as follows:

"Dearest Friend,

"The saddest of events is befalling me; my beloved mother is indeed at the point of death! Ah, how can I write it?—but I must control my feelings, for I am alone—Bernard is gone for Father Cradock.

"Alas, my friend, what a heavy sorrow hangs over me! Come hither with what speed you can; you only can comfort me—you only can teach me to resign her. But what is far more important, my poor mother prays earnestly to see you, and to see my brothers also: bring them with you—who knows the blessed influence of such a meeting? and, oh, my friend, of such a parting!

"I confide all to your goodness. Come quickly!

"I write with a breaking heart, and eyes swimming with tears.—Adieu!

"Yours ever, in sorrow as in joy.—Joy! what a word is that to write at this moment!

"J. G."

To ride instantly to Denborough Park was the first impulse of his heart; and without bestowing another glance on the scene which but a few moments before had occupied him so deeply, he ascended the hill and was presently in the town.

No sooner had Walter entered the small hostelry, than the fair Peggy, inviting him into the little parlour, accosted him with streaming tears.

"Oh, sir, you are his friend, and can save him: let him not be committed to prison!"

"Is it Mr. Grimstone of whom you speak?" asked Walter, touched with the poor girl's distress.

"Oh yes, sir, yes!" replied she, blushing deeply in the midst of her tears; "and his

lordship, they say, and Colonel Haughton, insist on his committal!"

"Is his folly treated thus severely?" said Walter. "But of a truth he deserved punishment."

"Then you will not befriend him!" exclaimed she in despair. "O that I were a man!" added she, forgetting or regardless of Walter's presence; "then I would go to prison for him: but what can a poor girl do!"

Just then the old woman also entered, and looking on her grand-daughter with displeasure, bade her get about her own business, and not stand talking to every handsome gentleman who came to the house, like an idle huzzy as she was. Thus reproved, Peggy withdrew, and the grandmother presented a slovenly folded paper to Walter, telling him that it was come for him from Justice Halliday's; adding,

"This is a sore job of Mr. Christopher's! but you mun be off, sir! we munna let him go to gaol! I will order your horse to be saddled—it 'll save you the time!" And so saying, she left Walter to read his second billet, which ran thus:—

"Take horse and ride here instantly; I want your help! Stay not to reason about it—for God's sake, come! I am the most unfortunate of men; let not my past misconduct, or rather madness, provoke you. On my soul, I will give you no further cause for offence or regret!

"Your most unfortunate servant,

"C. GRIMSTONE."

The case was clear, and was much more serious than Walter had imagined; and however he might have felt disposed to act towards Grimstone for his own sake, the desire which Lady Grimstone had expressed to see her sons was so natural and reasonable, that Walter, forcibly drowning the voice of reason in what he deemed a sacred though severe duty, inquiring the way to the justice's, put spurs to his horse, and very soon gained the house, his intention being to get Grimstone liberated if possible.

Walter found the justice a solemn, portly little man, who, in his cocked-hat, light blue coat, and with his gold-headed cane, was walking leisurely among his flower-borders in the front of his house, in the warm light of the setting sun.

His worship, who reverenced wealth and rank with most laudable zeal, inasmuch as he held poverty and crime synonymous, perceived instantly that Walter was a person to be treated with respect.

"Your servant, sir," said he therefore, in acknowledgment of Constable's much less submissive salutation,—"Your servant, sir," and lifted his cocked-hat so as to reveal the smooth, bald crown, white over with powder.

Walter's business was soon told, but not as soon transacted. The justice would not believe Grimstone to have been drunk: the earl, he said, Colonel Haughton—none of the gentlemen considered him to be drunk, and according to his humble opinion he appeared perfectly sober: the action was a cool assault, and his worship had no other means of liberating him but by sufficient bail for his good behaviour. Walter persisted in arguing that it was but a drunken frolic, of which the shame and consequent apologies of Christopher when sober would convince the earl, and lead to his liberation. But there was too much responsibility on the justice to allow *him* to be so persuaded; and Walter saw that if he

must keep faith with Lady Grimstone, or indulge the earnest desires of Julia, there was no alternative but to be bound for him. He felt that it was like running a course ruinous to himself and useless to Christopher, with open eyes; but honour and affection seemed now to demand it of him; he felt compelled to make a wilful plunge into a desperate gulf, and at once inwardly blaming his own folly and yet vindicating himself as under a stern necessity, he made the sacrifice with a groan, and was bound, in order that that very hour Christopher and his brothers might return with him to Denborough Park.

This being agreed to, the justice set forth in pompous terms the offence of which Grimstone had been guilty,—an assault on the person of the Honourable Henry Finch. "It would have been a melancholy duty, he averred, to have committed the son of a brother magistrate—the son of a man of unquestionable honour, a most worthy man, as Sir Harbottle Grimstone was." All men of wealth were in the good justice's eyes men of unquestionable honour and worth. "To have committed such a one to his majesty's county gaol for a misdemeanour of so serious a nature—a mis-

demeanour of which any poacher or common cut-throat might have been guilty, would certainly have been a most trying duty; but that, on his entering into a recognisance of three hundred pounds to appear in court at the ensuing sessions, and in the mean time to keep the peace, Mr. Walter Constable himself being surety therefor, he should be at liberty to attend him." Time pressed, and Walter had not even a moment to deliberate: if his good angel warned him, he regarded him not. The recognisance was prepared, and Walter was introduced to the room where Grimstone remained a prisoner. Without having pictured to himself how the disgrace had been borne by him, Walter certainly felt rather surprised and extremely provoked, especially after the urgent summons he had received from Grimstone himself, to find him asleep on a sofa, where too he had evidently taken great pains to insure his body convenience, and to see him then rise up with an air of perfect indifference, and on hearing what had been done for him, snap his fingers, and swear it was a good joke!

Christopher had ridden to the justice's attended by his grooms, and they now came forth rosy

from the kitchen, and with many an outward sign beside of the good cheer they had been enjoying there. Walter related to them the melancholy news which he had received from Denborough Park, told of their mother's earnest prayer to see them, and urged them to speed in order that they might find her alive.

They had unfortunately yet to return through Tutbury, the justice living beyond upon another road. As they entered the town, the bull, which had been captured by the Staffordshiremen, — but not without a violent contention with the other party, and even a long and bloody battle, the uproar and tumult of which was heard that night even at Wood Leighton, — had subsequently been killed, and was just at that time borne in triumph through the streets on a platform raised shoulder-high, decorated with ribbons, flowers, and large branches of laurel, preceded by torches and music, and followed by an immense and unruly concourse, shouting, reeling, singing, and dancing,— a procession worthy of the wildest rites among the groves and mountains of Crete.

In crossing the street, they became entangled with the crowd; and when it was gone by, Wal-

ter looked round in vain for his companions. Provoked beyond measure at this, which he thought might be intentional in order that they might remain to partake the license of the evening, he turned his horse, and pursued the tumultuous company, looking on all sides for the Grimstones; but they were not to be seen. He rode down to the small hostelry, but they were not there; and, without stopping to answer the inquiries of the fair Peggy, or of her not less anxious grandmother, and mortified to have lost thus much time, spurred his horse to a gallop, and took the high road to Wood Leighton, thinking it possible that they might have ridden on before him; but neither were they on the road, nor could he hear of their having been seen upon it.

It was long past ten o'clock when he reached Denborough Park; and as Walter advanced along the silent and dimly-lighted passages, his heart warned him truly of the tidings that awaited him. Lady Grimstone was dead. And after a melancholy meeting with Julia, Bernard, and Father Cradock, Walter hastened to Westow.

It would be in vain to attempt to describe

or unravel his feelings as he rode homeward. A sense of the folly into which he had been, as he now thought, weakly betrayed by his sympathy with Lady Grimstone and his love for Julia, hung on him with a dark and most depressing weight. "Fool!" he continually exclaimed to himself, "how could I be so weak! how could I hope for a moment to produce the slightest good effect on such abandoned wretches as those brothers! how could I be deluded into so Quixotic an enterprise as to accompany them to such a scene!" And yet he continually again questioned of himself, in the fond desire to do away the impression that he *had* been weak and foolish, "Yet, how *could* I help it? Could I be so barbarous as to let that worthy and afflicted woman go down to the grave with the blunt assurance that I would not move a finger for the promotion of her dearest wishes? — so barbarous as to tell her to her face that her sons were hopeless reprobates, and the very attempt to reclaim them certain destruction to the firmest character?" Yet, spite of all his fond self-persuasions, the sense of a weak imprudence, and a darker sense of vague apprehensions, and fearful and destructive

consequences—he could not tell what—from this rash undertaking, haunted him, and caused him to pass a sleepless night of the saddest, most depressing, and torturing state of mind that he had ever endured.

CHAPTER IX.

The next morning, before Walter left his bed, his mother presented herself in his chamber with a countenance of such unusual agitation, as immediately confirmed his worst apprehensions, and made him instantly demand what awful tidings she brought.

"Father Cradock waits to see you," said she; "rise, my son—here is strange news!"

"Is Julia dead?" asked he with terror.

"No, no!" replied Mrs. Constable, vexed that his first thought was of a Grimstone; and bidding him again hasten, she left him in no enviable state of suspense.

Walter dressed with almost incredible speed, and entered the room in which Father Cradock and Mrs. Constable sat together in deep consul-

tation. The old man's countenance of a certainty indicated anything but good news, and Walter impatiently demanded what tidings he brought.

Father Cradock stroked his white hair, and said sorrowfully that they were not such as he would like to hear.

"Tell me then instantly!" exclaimed Walter: "you torture me by this suspense."

"Of a surety," said the priest, "if such things were permitted now-a-days, I should believe the Evil One to have bodily possession of Christopher Grimstone!"

"That he has, there is no doubt of it!" exclaimed Mrs. Constable.

"What of Christopher Grimstone?" asked Walter in a tone of angry impatience. "Speak it out at once!"

"Peace, my son, peace!" said the old man, again stroking down his high, bald forehead. He then inquired at what place Walter had left the Grimstones, and how much of the day before had been spent in their company.

Walter, though still burning to know the exact tidings which Father Cradock had to relate, told circumstantially the events of the day.

The old man crossed himself when he had ended, and muttered a few words of thanksgiving: "I believed you innocent!" said he with emphasis.

"I told you he could not be otherwise!" said Mrs. Constable.

"Of what am I suspected? Speak out, Father Cradock!" said Walter, "if you would have me keep my senses."

The old priest then related, that an express had just arrived from Justice Halliday with warrants for the apprehension of the three Grimstones, on these grounds of suspicion: that it had been proved that Christopher and his brothers had ridden from Tutbury to Hanbury, on the edge of Needwood Forest, where they had regaled themselves, and which place they had left about half-past nine o'clock, taking the road onward to the forest; that the earl's coach, containing himself and two ladies, with his nephew on the box and two out-riders, had also passed through about a quarter of an hour afterwards, on their way to Lichfield, which place, late as it then was, and unfrequented and lonesome as was the road and the district through which they had to pass, they intended to reach

that night. That somewhere near the by-road that led to the Hoar-cross, in the depths of the forest, the coach was stopped, as was supposed at first, by highwaymen, for the purpose of plunder. Accordingly their money and watches were offered them without hesitation. This, however, was not their object; nothing was taken from them, but a forcible attempt was made to carry off the younger lady; but in consequence of resistance offered by the younger gentleman and the two out-riders, the villains, who also were three in number, were defeated; but, woful to relate, one of them had paid dearly for his temerity—his life was the sacrifice. The fact of the man being dead was clearly ascertained; the two decamped, and the body was thrown by the way-side; the coach then, with its inmates more dead than alive from terror, drove at its utmost speed to Yoxall, which lay but a few miles onward, where, instead of going forward, they remained through the night.

Many were the exclamations both of indignation and surprise with which Walter interrupted this relation. He again bitterly cursed his own facility of temper, which had made him responsi-

ble for so desperate a ruffian. "And which of these villains," asked he, "has been killed in this outrage?"

"That," said Father Cradock, "I have yet to relate. From Yoxall persons were instantly despatched for the body, accompanied by one of the out-riders to point out the exact spot; but the body was not to be found: the survivors, it is supposed, returned and conveyed it away to prevent their persons being identified. No traces were discoverable beyond the blood where the body had fallen and afterwards been laid: it had been removed carefully and expeditiously. The whole country, however, is roused in pursuit both of the living and the dead, which last it is imagined has been thrown into some pond or thicket of the forest."

Walter sat for some time without speaking; his countenance darkened, his brow knit, and his consciousness growing into a burning desire for vengeance.

"Well, my son," asked Mrs. Constable in triumphant resentment, "what think you of your friends now?"

"Do you consider *me* the friend of these ruffians, Mrs. Constable?" demanded Walter with a tone and glance which made his mother feel how unjust and unkind had been her taunt.

"By G—d!" exclaimed Walter, "I will rouse heaven and earth but these villains shall be brought to punishment!"

"Vengeance is the Lord's, and he will repay it," said the mild voice of the priest. "Besides, there are those who deeply suffer from this awful visitation: of a truth that sainted woman was removed from the evil to come!"

"But, said you not," asked Walter, "that *I* was implicated in this affair?"

Father Cradock then went on again to say, that though the persons who were guilty of this outrage had not been sworn to as the Grimstones; for owing to the darkness of the night, the thickness of the forest, and the general confusion of the scene, their persons had not been distinctly visible, though that they were three was clearly ascertained; and moreover, as the body had not been found, it had not been identified;—still suspicion was strong against the Grimstones. The conduct

of Christopher on the castle-hill, and their being at the very time on the road—a road so entirely out of their homeward course, seemed to leave no doubt but that they were the depredators of the outrage; that perhaps the circumstance of Walter's being seen with them the day before, or because he had procured the liberation of Christopher, might have in some degree turned public attention upon him. True, however, it was, a warrant at that very time awaited to carry him before the nearest magistrate to answer to this suspicion. Beyond this, Father Cradock told that the warrant, he understood, had been issued at the express desire of the Earl of N——, who, it was said, had taken serious umbrage against Walter, the cause whereof however he could not ascertain.

The proud and sensitive spirit of Walter felt the very suspicion itself as the most cruel wrong. "Yet," said he, "is it no more than the natural consequence of being seen in such company, and moreover giving security for such fellows!"

"Thank God, however," continued he, "that this suspicion has taken a tangible form! The

very publicity of the impeachment must be accompanied by an allowance of my honour at once! —it must and shall!"

In obedience, therefore, to the warrant, Walter presented himself before the magistrates, who were that day met at Wood Leighton. The circumstance had got wind; the affair of the Grimstones was the universal theme; and that Walter Constable could by any possibility be implicated with them, was the strangest thing of all. The justice-room was crowded, and Walter had the satisfaction of finding that public opinion acquitted him even before the case was examined. And when he stated in a clear and candid manner, that every one must have felt how repugnant his appearance with such a man as Christopher Grimstone in such a scene must have been, and that nothing but the solemn dying request of Lady Grimstone, made in the fond hope of saving him from some foolish act, and consequent deeper disgrace and recklessness, could have induced him to accept the office he had so fruitlessly undertaken, Walter was cleared in the most honourable manner; not the shadow of a doubt

remained against him. This implication of an honourable and unimpeachable man, as every one felt Walter Constable to be, excited public indignation still more against the Grimstones. That Christopher Grimstone should have rendered himself amenable to the laws by a second, even more audacious outrage, at the very time when Constable had made himself responsible for his actions, not from personal regard to him, but in order that he might hasten to the death-bed of his mother was an accumulation of guilt, and indicated a more base, a more selfish nature than even public opinion had hitherto believed him capable of.

Walter's anxiety had been intensely great, as to the means by which the forfeit sum for which he was become responsible should be raised. True, until the body was found and identified as a Grimstone, the case rested on suspicion; but that suspicion was considered by all as a certainty, —Christopher was already convicted by public estimation. This anxiety, however, was set at rest by a sealed packet being brought into the justice-room, and delivered to him,—from Denborough

Park, as was said, and, as was also understood, from Sir Harbottle Grimstone. It contained three hundred pounds, and a slip of paper purporting that it was to cover the demand upon Mr. Walter Constable, in case of the conviction of Mr. Grimstone.

There was nothing extraordinary in the circumstance itself,—it was but common justice, common honesty; and Walter, inexpressibly relieved, returned to Westow, having placed the money in the hands of the magistrates, to answer his recognisance in case the Grimstones were legally proved to have been guilty of this outrage, otherwise to be returned to Sir Harbottle Grimstone, wishing neither to hold Sir Harbottle's money, nor to have any public obstacle to his own departure from the country which his anticipated engagements with the marquis might require. We said there was nothing extraordinary in the circumstance; but we were wrong: both Walter and the gentleman to whom he consigned the contents of the packet agreed, that as the action of Sir Harbottle Grimstone, it certainly *was* extraordinary; but all agreed that, doubtless, the

death of his lady had touched his heart with a natural sorrow, and opened it to more generous sentiments than commonly operated upon it. Sir Harbottle gained great credit by this act of gratuitous justice.

What was the cause Walter Constable did not go that evening to Denborough Park, it is impossible to say. He doubted not the distress of his friends, and he did not need telling that his presence there would have been consoling to them; still he did not go there; and even when Mrs. Constable remarked in the course of their conversation, "that her heart truly bled for Miss Julia Grimstone, yet her utter disgust for the family outweighed even her sympathy for her," he heard the remark without reply.

Walter talked that night again of his former schemes of personal advancement; spoke of the weariness of a life of inaction, and declared himself impatient till the time came when he should leave this neighbourhood altogether. He did not forget, it is true, that Bernard Grimstone's views in life were connected with his own, nor did he wish the connexion between them annulled,

but, for that night, he made no mention of his name.

It cannot be supposed this while, that his friends at Denborough Park were equally as apparently regardless of him. Acute as was their grief for the death of their mother, still more agonising were the events which had succeeded it, made yet more distressing from the implication of Walter, and the way in which he might become a sufferer in the guilt of their brothers.

It was within the chamber of death that these two noble-minded young people sat together that morning, mingling their tears, and humiliated in the degradation of their house. Their intense mourning for the dead was over; for how could they sorrow for her who had so evidently departed from the evil to come! The most immediate subject of anxiety was how to free Walter from the bond he had subjected himself to; and, as the most legitimate means, they resolved upon applying to their father.

Had Bernard demanded his father's life, his surprise could not have been greater than it was on hearing for what he asked. It was the first

time that Bernard himself had ever asked his father for money, and the strangeness of the circumstance did not escape Sir Harbottle's notice.

"And pray, sir," asked the father, when both Bernard and Julia had gone through all their arguments of equity and honour,—"And pray, sir, who desired Mr. Constable to make himself responsible for the actions of that d—d rascal? who invited him to meddle or to make? and what, I ask ye, have we to thank him for in so doing? Is not the whole of this confounded business his own bringing about? Christopher and the rest of the pack should have gone to the devil for me! I shall not raise the money! he that was fool enough to do it may abide by his own folly! When I ask Mr. Walter Constable to advance money, why then I 'll pay him, and not till then! I am not going to throw my money to every blockhead who puts himself in the shoes of every one that calls himself Grimstone,—d' ye hear that? and by ——, if you come here asking for money, why I 'll e'en make it scarcer than it has been!"

Still Bernard remonstrated, and Julia seconded his arguments by tears and the most tender persuasions; but the more they pleaded, the more resolutely determined became their father; until, at length, he overpowered them with oaths and threats, and sent them silenced and heart-broken back to their own apartment.

"This money then shall go," said Bernard, bringing forth the sum which had been advanced for his own outfit in life. Julia had remembered this money, but had not ventured to hint of its being so applied.

"Heaven reward you, dearest Bernard!" exclaimed the weeping Julia, and kissing his outstretched hand; "but it is such a sacrifice!"

"No, no," replied Bernard firmly, "it is but justice, — it is but what our honour demands, it must go!"

The money was still deficient many pounds—far more than they themselves had any means of supplying; and to apply again to their father even for this smaller sum, was what they did not dare to do. Without saying a word, and blinded by her tears, Julia opened the small cabinet

where her mother kept her few valuables, and where she knew was deposited her carefully-husbanded allowance; but the purse contained only a couple of guineas. Julia's eye, however, fell upon another, an ancient one long disused, which appeared tolerably filled; and to it was attached a small paper. The paper contained the handwriting of Lady Grimstone, feeble and scarcely legible, written the day before her death. "The money," it said, "contained within this purse, was of many years' saving, by long and painful economy, and was left to be divided between her two dear children, Julia and Bernard Grimstone; not to purchase mourning ornaments with — they did not need such to keep their mother in their memory,—but for their own proper use, or to be applied to any urgent need, as they might see fit."

Both brother and sister read the paper. Julia did not speak, — she did not even dare to think,—but, falling on her knees before the crucifix which had always hung over her mother's cabinet, poured out the emotion of her soul in silent devotion. Bernard, touched beyond ex-

pression by this proof of his mother's tender, thoughtful affection, and with feelings too powerful almost to be contained within his breast, covered his face with his hands, and wept like a woman.

The sacrifice was made: the sacred bequest,—little as it was, yet enough to eke out the required sum,—was applied to an urgent need, as their honourable hearts felt this indeed to be, and the money was received into the hands of Walter Constable without its exciting any sentiment of gratitude—any emotion whatever.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

LONDON:
PRINTED BY SAMUEL BENTLEY,
Dorset Street, Fleet Street.